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CELIA ONCE AGAIN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

CELIA'S FRIENDS

THE ELOPEMENT

CELIA ONCE AGAIN

BY

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THE PIC-NIC

THESE events transpired during the so-called summer of nineteen thirteen. Celia suddenly decided to get up a pic-nic, and before anyone could say Jack Robinson or arrange any previous engagements, we were all booked for it. No one really likes pic-nics, I am sure of that, and men just loathe them. For no matter whether a man be campaigning or prospecting or big-game hunting he likes to have his meals in some degree of comfort, and this is precisely what never occurs upon a pic-nic.

Once settled, wherever Celia went she invited people out upon this expedition. Fortunately very many fought shy of it, but in spite of lots of refusals she got fourteen acceptances.

Now there are two sorts of Pic-nics : those in which things go right more or less, and those in which things go wrong, and this pic-nic I am going to tell you about belongs to the latter variety. I am telling you all about it so that you may have some idea of the difficulties and exigencies that beset people who thoughtlessly set out, determined to live a life of toil-free, careless pleasure. What made it a worse form of pleasure than usual was that it was a sort of protracted pic-nic ; it was to combine a week-end and while it lasted we were to cover a lot of ground or, as it subsequently turned out, a lot of water. We had first to arrange where we would go, and that you can see among friends led to a fearful lot of talk, chipping and general impoliteness, and mutual recriminations. Miss Lamb, Vera, Dan and I were permitted to assist Celia in making up her mind. That is to say, we quarrelled among ourselves as to the respective merits

of different places. Each of us wanted Celia to select the particular place we recommended or fancied, and said tosh to anyone else's suggestion, and as soon as Celia seemed about to fix on any one place everyone suddenly thought of some horrid drawback to it, such as perpetual east winds, bad hotels or defective drainage or trippers or else someone remembered they had read a few days before that typhus or diphtheria was raging there.

In the end the weather decided for us. It suddenly got so terribly hot that instinctively and with one accord next day we all thought of the River, and everyone rang Celia up and suggested it *so that* was settled on.

Oxford it was decided was to be our first stopping place. We were to motor there on Saturday, a gay, careless party, all out to enjoy ourselves. We'd arrive there in time for lunch and walk round the dear old Colleges. M. de Brissac, the great Frenchman, would so enjoy it and Celia's eyes sparkled as they always did when she thinks she is going to give someone a special treat.

After that, next day, we were to wander by launch to a spot midway down the River, lunching on the banks, and Sunday night we'd spend at a delightful little Riverside Hotel, nestling in a perfect bower of green, a little Eden of its own. Those of the party who had appointments in Town next day could catch a morning express on Monday, whilst the others could come down by river all the way to Windsor by launch and there get into the motors which would be awaiting them. It all sounds very easy, but it was surprising how much time and hard work it took to plan out this seemingly simple itinerary, and that we should have squabbled so over it. It is a mystery to me how friends stay friendly, who see much of each other, especially if they do many things or knock about on pleasure trips together. I get on best with my enemies really, for

I take good care not to see too much of them. We are (or were) all very fond of one another, but metaphorically speaking, we very nearly came to blows before we fixed this up.

However after, as I say, much agitating thought and many suggestions and counter-suggestions, hotels were rung up, distances arranged and all the main lines of the affair settled.

Celia, Vera and Miss Lamb held up the proceedings and wasted a lot of time by debating as to whether they would bring maids, and having settled that, they had to settle whether they would take evening dresses, high smart dresses or blouses, and having decided it was to be blouses, the question was—which blouses.

Women are so funny!

It was agreed that we should travel light. Dan said he was a past-master at this. He could travel shorthand as far as luggage was concerned, but he said he had grave doubts as to whether I could do it for when he went up to Scotland once with me he said I took a separate cardboard box for every collar, and that I had a pet sponge the size of a man's head with a special aluminium case for it as big as a little trunk to itself. Celia said that was all very well but I must make an effort, and I said I'd do with as little as I could, but that I must have a dinner jacket and trousers and three suits, three pairs of shoes and trees, and one pair of boots and trees——

"Nonsense, Peter, why we ladies are only going to take two dresses each, day and evening, and shoes the same. Luggage is the most awful nuisance on a trip like this. It's quite impossible to take a lot. As the shoes and trees are the heaviest you must cut them down."

I was obdurate, and said I must have a pair of evening shoes (Oxford), a pair of tan shoes to motor down in on Saturday, a pair of white buckskin boots for the River on Sunday, and a pair of black polishing calf shoes to go to the Law Courts in on Monday.

Celia said "No, nonsense." Two pairs were ample. I was to travel in the black calf on Saturday and to wear the tan shoes on Sunday and Monday. I told her I couldn't possibly wear the same pair of shoes two days running——

"You won't be running; you won't even be walking. You'll be sitting most of the time," said Dan.

—running. No matter what happened I always gave my shoes a rest, wearing them alternate days. No one who thought anything of their shoes would do otherwise.

"It's I who will need a rest after this, not your shoes, if you persist in being so unreasonable," Celia said.

"You brought it on yourself. You thought of the pic-nic, not I!"

Dan said shoes were shoes and good shoes especially were very difficult to deal with, but to him the buckskin boots appeared a superfluity.

I said I hated tan shoes and flannels. I said I had been brought up to know that the best people always wore white buckskin boots on the River, or else white canvas with brown strappings on them.

Dan said "the best people be —— jiggered."

"I have it!" said Celia, who had borrowed my pencil and had worked it out on a piece of paper. "You can wear your tan shoes on Saturday going down, your polishing calf shoes on Sunday and your tan again on Monday, and they'll have had a day's rest like that." She was beginning to get quite interested in the problem.

"Black calf shoes and white flannels together! My *dear* Celia!" I said icily, as if the thing were too monstrous to dilate upon. She quailed at the irony in my tone. She defers to me in matters pertaining to men's clothing, I must say.

"Besides how am I to appear at the Temple on

Monday in a black braided morning coat and striped trousers with a tall hat and wearing tan shoes ? "

" A tall hat ! " they all cried, " are you going to bring a tall hat ? "

" I am indeed."

Everyone threw up their eyes and hands.

" Why on earth not wear your blue suit, a bowler hat and the tan shoes on Monday and be done with it ? "

" For the simple reason that I *never* give my suits less than a two days' rest between wearing them——"

Vera jumped up and walked round the room fuming :

" Well, of all the fussy old maids, Peter, you are the worst ! "

" Upon my word ! " I frowned at her, " apart entirely from that aspect of the thing, may I tell you, Vera, that it wouldn't do at all for a rising barrister to be seen in the Temple in a blue suit and a pair of tan shoes. He'd be looked upon as dilettante. It would be considered a sign of unsteadiness and unreliability."

Celia snorted. Yes, she really did, and said I was morbid and self-conscious about my personal appearance beyond anybody or anything she had ever met. She supposed she'd have to have an extra motor to carry all my paraphernalia, as there wasn't time to alter this side of me before the pic-nic, but she'd see what she could do afterwards.

Dan said that anyone who made such a fetish of nuttiness and conventional garb, ought to be taken out and shot at dawn.

That being settled, there was the question of how many cars we could muster. Celia's closed car was under repair, but that didn't matter weather like this—and we glanced approvingly out of the window. So more telephoning ensued and as soon as we had arranged things and calculated numbers to a nicety and how many rooms were needed and so on, and launch accommodation, someone rang up and cried off or said a rich uncle had turned up from Australia, or

they were very ill or something, and asked to be excused. We flew to our papers and reorganised lists, and having done so, three people would ring up and say might they change their minds as the weather was so hot. Someone (I didn't know the voice) got shirty because I asked him if the hot weather always affected him that way. He didn't come (I found out after) and it was as well, for we'd have been an odd number if he had.

Vera and Miss Lamb undertook to look after the booking of the rooms and Dan undertook to agitate about the catering of the launches and the ordering of them. I undertook to look up the best roads to get to our various destinations by motor. I am considered rather good at this. It's not difficult if you avoid all the scenery and points of interest. Roads are always bad where there are hills or valleys and where they are lined with trees that drip on them and spoil the surface. I avoid the little spidery roads and stick to the main arteries by which you can calculate to arrive in nice time for meals. Celia undertook not to ask any more people and upset all our arrangements at the last minute.

We wrangled greatly as to who should go in which car, but while we were wrangling Celia who had borrowed my pencil when I wasn't looking quietly made a list and refused to go back on it. I wanted to tool her along in the Rolls torpedo but she said she had promised Captain Bulkeley to go down with him in his sixty H.P. two-seater. I retrieved my pencil and bit the end of it.

It was the first I had heard of Bulkeley's coming, but Celia, I daresay, had purposely withheld the news till all was settled, knowing that I would have had four or five previous engagements to prevent my coming if I had known it. She said she had promised him ages and ages ago to do so, and she must abide by it. I chewed my pencil again. I don't believe in those promises which are made ages and ages before a thing has been even thought of.

Lord and Lady Edward could go down in their own little car.

"Peter, you can take four others in the big Rolls. No, you can't drive it. Hudson says that he won't let it out of his hands till it's overhauled, for it's got a knock. Mrs Carstairs has bagged the front seat so you must take Ethel, Fatty Bellew and Mr Rosenberg with you."

"Mr Rosenberg, Celia! I'd really rather not. Can't you put someone else in? I don't want to sit *vis-à-vis* to that horrid fellow for all that time."

"What is there you dislike about him?"

"His nose."

"Oh, only a little thing like that!"

"It's not a little thing. It's an enormous thing. I've no objection to good dark Jewish features. I really rather like them, but I do not at all like a salmon-pink Jewish nose. It's not my fault. I was brought up very carefully surrounded by photographs of the best Greek sculptures, and a thing like that really upsets me."

"I particularly wish him to go in your car. He likes little Ethel so much and she wants to go with you because she doesn't feel shy with you, so you must put up with it. He's one of the biggest banking experts in Europe, so don't be rude to him, for he has promised to help me a lot in my charitable schemes. You needn't talk to him. You will have Fatty Bellew in with you. He's just back from the Klondyke and sure to be interesting. Dan will take Ada Lamb, Vera and M. de Brissac and Boris Hintoff——"

"Is that Hintoff the Russian tenor from Covent Garden?" inquired Vera.

"Yes, he's such a dear, so interesting about Russia. I thought he would sing to us at night, as we drift about in punts after dinner. How lovely his voice will sound floating over the water."

"Yes, it will be delightful, but don't you think it will be very risky?"

"Risky! Why should it be risky?"

"Well, you know what tenors are, such delicate creatures. Always catching colds and having to break their contracts. You might have to pay a huge sum of money if anything happened to him through you. He is booked to appear most of next week at Covent Garden, I know. It's rather a responsibility."

"You don't really think," said Celia nervously, "that I could be stuck for damages if he catches cold at my pic-nic. Is there anything in their contracts saying they must not accept invitations to them?"

"Oh, nothing specific but it's a risk. You know what the law is. It can be twisted to mean anything."

"Well, he's dying to come, and I don't want to put him off. You will have to look after him for me."

"Well, I dislike tenors as much as I dislike anything, but I suppose I must if you wish it."

"Now, Vera and Ada, have you noted that I want you to ring up the other people about their maids, and tell them what time to be here with the luggage on Saturday morning?"

"Yes," said Miss Lamb short-sightedly consulting some notes on the back of an envelope.

"Oh, that reminds me—Vera—don't forget to remind me to remember to tell Adele that I will wear my white accordion-pleated serge."

"Right you are."

Saturday morning dawned as best it could in the face of gusts of chill rain and sodden lowering clouds. My window panes rattled in their sashes and my teeth in their sockets for in accordance with a special little habit of my own I had got a chill owing to the great heat of the past week.

No wonder we talk about the weather in this tight little island of ours. It is the most original, unexpected

and absorbing subject that one could choose. After all the sweltering, gasping heat of the past eight days it had changed as by a miracle during the night. It was a terrible day. I looked out upon it in dismay as I pressed my finely formed nose to the window panes down which little streams of water trickled and joined up methodically and continually. I rushed to the telephone and tried to get on to Celia. The line was repeatedly engaged, so I judged that the others were probably trying to cry off too. I got on presently, but she was remorseless and said the rain was nothing, and that she never changed her mind (oh, what a whopper !) about her plans once they were made. She must have been just as firm with all the others, for when I got to her house, they were arriving steadily.

When we were all there she told Habits to pack the maids and the luggage in their car, and she said to us, "Come along, let's start at once. We'll quickly leave this little shower behind. It's only local." She was afraid someone would persuade her to have some common-sense and postpone the pic-nic, I think.

People had come well-wrapped up, and every coat in the house was commandeered and Captain Bulkeley pointed proudly to a heap he had brought along in case of need. There were several of them, but one in particular arrested my attention and I lifted a flap on the end of my stick to have a look at it. It was a coat, but what a coat ! I had never seen anything like it. It was big and old and mended, and indescribable and weather-stained, lined with the shaggy fleece of some unnamed—and I added to myself, still untamed—creature. It was a coat of many colours and not only that, it was a coat of many odours, for it smelt of grouse moors and snipe bogs, of Ireland and Scotland, of red deer and bison and bears, especially bears ; of dogs and of birds, of fish and of horses, of Europe, Asia and Africa, of the Bazaars of Benares, of the Banks of the Ganges, of Nairobi and Nyassa—I should have recognised it anywhere as the coat of Bulkeley the millionaire

shikari, sportsman and mighty hunter. For it was a rich man's coat indeed. No one but a rich man would have dared to own to such a coat. No one but a rich man could have afforded the upkeep of such an odour about a coat. It took my breath away when I thought of what it must have cost to produce it. It took my breath away for other reasons too.

Bulkeley saw me looking at it:

"Old Man," he called out, "you are welcome to anything there; take one, you have a cold and should wrap up well."

I shuddered as I let it drop back upon the others.

"Thanks, Old Chap, but I think I am all right for coats to-day," and I applied my handkerchief to my nose.

According to the pencil lists (made with my gold pencil which had disappeared) we bundled ourselves into the open cars wrapped up to the eyes. Fatty Bellew said he hadn't had so many clothes on since he spent Christmas in the Yukon.

From where I was I could see Bulkeley making a frightful fuss over Celia. He evidently, I now saw, had been looking forward to this for many a long day, and he was not going to be hurried over it to please anybody. He asked her to say precisely at what angle she wished the wind screen to be. He tried to persuade her to wear motor goggles (he had brought about a dozen pairs for her to choose from). He sent up for a muff to keep her hands warm. After all these preliminaries and preambles he began the main business of the whole affair, namely, the tucking of her in. My dislike of the man grew greater every moment. He tucked her in much too carefully, and I should think he stopped her circulation altogether. He bent over her, talking and laughing in his bluff way (his voice had a sort of musical rasp in it), his handsome bronzed and slightly scarred face all aglow with pleasure and excitement at his being her special cavalier.

And when one would have thought that the tucking-in process must be at an end, he'd manage to find some little loose flap which had escaped his attention or which he had pulled out, and he'd work away at that. He delayed our starting by a full twenty minutes, and when really the wrapping and tucking were finished he approached our car where we were immovably fixed, thanks to all the impedimenta we had on board, and to my horror he threw the coat of many colours and many odours in on top of us.

"Do have it, you chaps," he said genially. "We've plenty of 'em," and with that he went off rapidly to crank up his car.

"Good heavens! That fearsome thing. Hi! Bulkeley! . . ." but he only turned and waved his hand, thinking that it was our unselfishness that made us disinclined to accept it.

Fatty, the brute, was delighted with it, and pulled it about him, saying that it reminded him of the Klondyke. He sniffed it rapturously while Rosenberg and I looked at him spell-bound (or dare I say it?—smell-bound!).

"Do you REALLY mean to say that you don't object to the awful aroma of that awful coat, Fatty?" I said incredulously.

"Not at all. I quite like it."

"Well, all I can say is your nose must be deaf!"

I had the worst cold upon me that I'd had for years and yet the thing was only too apparent even to me.

Rosenberg shook his head and lit a big cigar.

"Oh, thanks so much," said little Ethel. "That's much better."

After that we started at half-past eleven instead of eleven as originally intended, squelching and ploughing through the wet, the rain blowing in on us.

Bulkeley's attentions to Celia had aroused such a blazing fire in my breast that it acted as a sort of foot-

warmer, applied to my upper extremities instead of my lower. I felt neither cold nor wet during that motor ride, so it was quite a mercy. For the first hour or so I sat glumly debating inside myself whether I would go and buy a large overdose of chloral or laudanum or whether arsenic was more efficacious and certain. All the ladies who wished to get rid of their husbands used arsenic, but I couldn't remember how many grains were needed to kill one. I had been reading of a case lately in which though the woman went to endless trouble she could not succeed in getting enough to do the trick, except by buying fly papers in large quantities. She had to buy so many that she was suspected and put under arrest before she could polish hers off, and instead of dying he developed a most wonderful pink and white complexion. I thought it might affect me in this way, and that I'd get a salmon-pink nose like Rosenberg, and felt I'd rather not try it on myself after all.

Through the gloomy mist of my thoughts I heard Fatty Bellew weaving awful yarns (taradiddles most of 'em, I expect) as to his hardships in Klondyke. I had said something in an undertone about the horrors of pic-nics, and he asked me in a very superior way what I would have done in Klondyke. He was as particular over his toilet as most men—this was quite true—but the only chance he had of washing himself there was about once in four months or so, with a piece wrenched off the end of an iceberg. He said going on a pic-nic in the worst of weather at home was doing it on velvet in comparison.

Rosenberg then picked up the thread of the conversation from Fatty who had gone on to describe some of the gold deposits he'd found and worked out. As soon as he mentioned gold Rosenberg relieved him of the necessity for further racking of his brains to invent tall tales.

Fatty was interested in the wringing of it from the hard, reluctant, frozen earth, and in the subsequent

spending of what he had got. Rosenberg only cared for it from his point of view. Not that he had the manners of a bloated capitalist, though from what he told us he lived and breathed and moved and walked and slept by money in some form or other. On the contrary he looked upon it, not exactly with contempt, but from a wider point of view, as the great vital liquid, the essential serum or life-fostering broth in which all things on which civilisation was based, and on which human material progress, and consequently indirectly human spiritual progress, floated. A broth which, if kept stirred and dealt with properly and understandingly, was of inestimable and unthought-of value to mankind. He seemed to combine many other enterprises with his banking. He said this was the duty of a banker. I remembered hearing that he was considered a very generous and go-ahead man in his dealings, financing freely things which he considered sound and respectable and likely to work out to the benefit of the community. From ordinary finance he went off on to the subject of international finance. Of this he said that, banker though he was, he understood little or nothing, or at any rate only what he had picked up as he went along. This wasn't his fault, for he had often tried to find someone who had studied the matter thoroughly and who could give him any reliable and proven information. But he said there were no such people and one had to go by guess-work or by one's own personal and individual theories, or those of the others in the business. Then he held forth on the movements of gold and bullion. I was not greatly interested in this subject. All I knew about it was that there had been no movements of gold in my direction lately, and I was depressed about it.

We must have been motoring for about two and a half hours, slogging along in the rain, squelching through puddles and skidding on tram lines. I glanced out

between the sticks of the hood and saw that we had left the main road and had branched off on to the less beaten tracks. By this time we should have been nearing Oxford. I had warned Celia that on no account must she do this as it would entirely throw us out of our time-table. I uttered an exclamation of annoyance. It was to be supposed that the hot-headed Bulkeley who led the way with her would only be too prone to despise the beaten track after the wilds of Nairobi or Asia Minor. A straight road with recurrent and equi-distant telegraph poles would be too uneventful for him. I was not surprised when the first car signalled the others to stop, and Bulkeley got out and walked towards us.

"I say, you chaps," he said, his bronzed face beaming as the raindrops trickled down it. "Have you got the maps?"

"Not in here, I think. I gave them into Dan's hands to take charge of a few days ago. Ask him."

"Right you are," and he clumped through the puddles and mud towards him. I saw them make a wild search with a great upheaval of coats, rugs, cushions and so on and then I saw Dan shake his head. After a few moments' conversation we started off again, through the rain-sodden lanes, with damp twigs brushing against the sides of the cars and the hoods. I estimated that we had run about thirty miles out of our way.

After about an hour's aimless wandering, turning and pulling up, and shouting to each other, we all stopped again. The rain didn't stop though. It poured unmercifully. Dan backed his car towards us and said, "Haven't you really got those maps? Do have a look."

I tried the side flaps, but found nothing and asked Dan why he hadn't taken the trouble to look after them when he'd said he would. The occupants of Dan's car

looked depressed and hungry. It was long past lunch-time and there seemed very little chance of getting it for quite some time. Even Fatty did not compare it favourably with the Klondyke. Celia and Bulkeley knew it was their fault for leaving the road I had looked out for them. I believe that Bulkeley had done it on purpose so as to make the drive with Celia longer.

"We must be near Oxford," Dan said, "there's no doubt of that, but the yokels are all hiding indoors in this awful rain, and the signposts don't mention anything but tiny little villages. Are you SURE you haven't got the maps? I believe I saw Habits or someone heave them in just before you all got in yourselves; try again; those pockets are so deep."

I dived down once more, and once more came up empty-handed.

"Absolutely nothing," I said, waving them both for all to see. "I can't make it out though," I continued. "Oxford ought to be hereabouts. That is"—I consulted my watch as I spoke and looked about me—"unless it has moved forward lately."

"That's very unlikely," Dan said in an irritated tone. "Of all the towns that I know that might do that, it is least likely to be Oxford. If it moved at all it would be backwards."

Dan is a Cambridge man.

I am an Oxford man.

"Don't try to be funny now, Dan, it's misplaced." I had got out and was standing in a puddle, trying to bring off a sneeze, for my cold was getting worse every minute.

"You began it, old son."

"Why not let Hudson take the lead and see if he can get us out of this muddle before nightfall. You fellows are not to be trusted."

Accordingly, our car took the lead and we plunged

wildly ahead. After some more bothers in the way of a wheel in a slimy, crumbling ditch, and everybody straining at the car to push it out again, we were lucky enough to almost run over a mud-clotted figure with an old potato sack over his head and having frightened his numbed brain into something like action, we got a series of dialect grunts and waves which actually put us upon the right road.

The weather had obligingly begun to lift as we ran into the outskirts. That was one of the peculiarities of this pic-nic. As soon as we got anywhere near shelter the weather lifted. So that when at last we drove our mud-plastered cars into Oxford, there was a gleam of watery sunshine to greet us.

We calculated it had taken us well over four hours to get down. Celia persuaded them to serve our belated lunches in double-quick time and after a few bright green cocktails we sat down almost cheerfully.

We dried our clothes afterwards by walking down the High, and round the old Colleges and Quadrangles. Dan, having gone down from Cambridge only five or six years before, insisted upon acting as our guide, because he said he could show us exactly where Oxford was inferior to it. He said if I showed them round I would be biassed, having been an Oxford man myself.

However, M. de Brissac and the Tenor followed me and went into raptures of admiration at what they saw. But they could not understand how it was that one could not learn more in such a wonderful place, considering the amount of space there was to house professors, from all over the world, and students also (who unconsciously help to teach one another as they both observed). I attached myself dutifully to the Russian. I had had a slight *contretemps* with him before starting. I had noticed that he was wearing a thinnish mackintosh, not heavy enough for motoring,

and I had remonstrated with him (of course I'd promised Celia to deliver him up in good order at the end of the trip and meant to keep my word) and offered him something more suitable, but he had refused it a little abruptly. When I saw him at the end of the motor run I knew that he had got thoroughly chilled and that he repented not having taken the advice and the wrap. I watched him now, and wished he would not open his mouth so wide in his admiration lest too much of the damp air be drawn into his high-priced throat. For even as there is a dank and chill air around an old University in dry weather, when it has rained continuously for hours and hours the dankness and chillness of that air can hardly be described. To a Russian, of course, a University is the most thrilling sight on earth. For here is to be found what he craves more than bread itself and that is knowledge. I was moved by the sight of his enthusiasm, and saw how his strange closely lidded eyes sparkled almost fanatically. He said, "Ah how wonderful, how wonderful to think how you in England can educate yourselves, while we in Russia hunger for it and yet we can hardly get it." He had an extraordinary face, something outlandish and strange about it. I tried to define it to myself, for it was in some wise typical of his race, I felt. It was a white blank face and yet there was expression in its blankness. It was blunt, for there seemed to be little detail in it, as if his ancestors had lived in the bare wind-swept places of the earth for countless generations. His pallid wide lips were set one upon the other in a passive way. In comparison with the faces of the people I saw around me, his face had an uninhabited look. His type interested me, his enthusiasm impressed me. I forgave him for being a tenor and I conversed amicably with him about his country.

As we paused in one of the old cold shadows, he shivered, and I shivered, partly on account of my own cold, partly fearing that he was also in for one. Sure enough he told me a few minutes afterwards that he was

sure he was inclining that way, and sympathised with me about mine.

Nothing draws two people together so much as both having bad colds at the same time. It is a better basis for a friendship than finding that one has mutual friends or even than finding one has mutual enemies. You can win and keep a man's friendship for years by letting him once think that you tried his infallible remedy for a cold and that it cured you. He told me exactly how his colds affected him, and how difficult he found it to get rid of them. I confided in him that it was not the cold I had now that I objected to but the long series to which it would be the forerunner. I told him that the man who looked after my rooms had this peculiarity, that he invariably caught my colds and that just as I was getting over the attack nicely I could rely on catching my own original cold back from him, and then he got it back from me, and so it went on *ad infinitum* until we had exhausted the possibilities of the original cold and ourselves too.

We looked at the Colleges and Halls till it was getting late and then Lord Edward had to take us to see his old rooms and introduced us to his old gyp, slapping him on the back. The old man most politely pretended to remember him, but I could see that he had forgotten him. Lord Edward was a nice unassuming little man with a bony forehead, otherwise of a very ordinary appearance, so I did not blame the gyp myself.

By now I could see my poor friend the tenor was horribly anxious about himself. I thought what an awful bore it must be to follow a profession in which whenever you exposed yourself to the elements or sat in a draught, you were *hors-de-combat* for some time. Thank goodness, unless it's so bad that one loses one's voice, a barrister can bully his witnesses and be just as pert to the judge, with or without a cold upon him. Hintoff kept dropping behind and trying husky little runs or sudden attacks on high notes whenever he thought I was out of earshot, and coughing tentatively

to see if his tonsils were swelling. I was glad when I piloted him back to the hotel in the gathering dusk and the renewed showers.

Little Gibbons met us very cheerily in the hall of the hotel. He had come down in a nice waterproof train, and he was inclined to joke about our damp journey. It was a great matter to have got him for more than a hurried meal, and for his sake I could have wished for better weather. Though not actually a big pot himself, he was the secretary and confidant of his cousin who was a very big pot indeed. No less a person than the Minister of Education for the moment. It was generally understood that they were hand in glove and that what Gibbon thought to-day stood a very good chance of cropping up in the minister's deep mind next week as something he had thought of entirely on his own. Seeing him here made one wonder what Celia was hatching now. I had not noticed any signs latterly to lead me to think that she was sickening for any special piece of interference in her country's affairs.

True to my promise once more, I got the tenor up to change his wet things. I ran about and found his luggage for him so that he wouldn't have to go prancing about the dark corridors hunting for it.

When I came down again I found Miss Lamb, Vera, Dan and Celia whispering guiltily together in a corner. It turned out that there had been a mistake about the rooms. The manageress had not expected so many of us, so there were none for Dan and me, and the other hotels were full too.

"Do you mind, Peter?—I AM so sorry, Peter, but I am afraid that you and Dan will have to go out and hunt for a night's lodging. After all, it's these sort of unexpected things that make up the charm of these expeditions," and she laughed, a little hollowly.

"Yes, but why not someone else? Why not that great bull-necked fellow Bulkeley? He is simply bursting with health and here am I in a high fever. Why must I be the victim?"

"Why, because Dan and you are my BEST friends. Captain Bulkeley and the others are only acquaintances. I CAN'T very well ask them. I don't know them well enough——"

I turned away moodily. This was getting very near the edge. I sometimes think that there are great, very great, drawbacks to being a person's best friend. They show their appreciation of and confidence in one by asking one to do all sorts of annoying and horrible things that they wouldn't dream of asking anyone else to do. I believe one might just us well be an enemy at once and be finished. People always treat their enemies with more civility than their friends. I looked at them all severely, and told them as much, but Dan tackled me and said, "Look here, Peter. Your liver is out of order. You are too grumpy for words. Why should Celia bother to invite you at all, and hamper herself with all your luggage and boot-trees as well? You are not the only good-looking fellow in the world, remember that."

Miss Lamb stuck up for me and said that no man was quite at his best when he was in lo—she meant, when he had a bad cold upon him.

"Cold or no cold, he is very depressing. Look here, Celia, I wouldn't ask him out for any more treats. He's a thorough old wet blanket. There's no doubt about it whatever, Peter, if you come out upon any more of these beanfeasts and want to enjoy yourself you'd better leave yourself behind, like the purse-proud man that Izaak Walton speaks of."

"How on earth can I be purse-proud when I am as poor as a church mouse?"

"It applies to poor as well as rich. It's a matter of temperament."

Miss Lamb and Vera were looking very upset, and I felt remorseful at making such a fuss. It had been their part of the arrangements to look after the booking of the rooms, and if I made too much it would come back upon their devoted heads. "All right, Celia. Keep

your hair on, Dan. We'll go out and hunt for those rooms, but first, Celia, a word in your ear."

I drew her aside and spoke seriously to her about the outrageous way in which she was behaving with Bulkeley. "Allowing him to tuck you in and lean over you and smile at you while your best friends are left out in the cold altogether. Is that treating him like an ACQUAINTANCE, might I ask? I'm afraid you don't know the real meaning of the words. I'll look them up in the dictionary—the Oxford Dictionary—and will show you that the construction you put on the two words will have to be reversed."

"I know exactly what I mean by them, thank you, and there is absolutely nothing between Captain Bulkeley and myself."

"From your point of view, perhaps not—but what about him? He'll get ideas. I can see him getting them. He's got several ideas already in fact. And if there is really nothing in it why work him up so by encouraging him in his absurd attentions?"

"Work him up so indeed! You mustn't speak to me like that. And you've no right to speak of Captain Bulkeley as if he were a sofa cushion I was making for a bazaar—work him up indeed!! If you talk to me like this, Peter, I shall begin to think that you have not got over your foolish infatuation for me yet."

I said with great dignity and some indistinctness, "Infatuation, yes! Foolish, no!"

But she went off in a towering huff.

Dan and I collared our bags and with the assistance of the boots, who was quite a new arrival in the town, walked out into the finely falling rain to look for rooms before dinner. We couldn't find any though we tramped about the place from street to street, hampered by the bags we had so foolishly brought with us. We tried several addresses that the hotel people had given us, but they were all a long way apart and in each case there was some let or hindrance. Either the landlady was ill or had given up letting rooms or else it wasn't

an apartment house at all. We also tried a lot of other houses in other streets, but all to no purpose. Even Dan got angry much to my satisfaction. I became quite cheerful then and made little jokes about it. I cynically quoted the words of Green the historian who said very scathingly that the University had found Oxford a busy, prosperous borough, came and planked itself down upon it and reduced it to a cluster of lodging-houses which it had remained ever since. Dan said it was what you might expect an historian to say. They were all silly juggins anyway, and if Green hadn't been dead for some years already it would have given him great pleasure to wring his neck, for he didn't believe there were any lodging-houses in Oxford, and didn't think there ever had been. He said that if Fatty Bellew mentioned Klondyke he would go home by the midnight train. We got back to the hotel rather late and persuaded Rosenberg to let us change hurriedly in his room.

Dinner itself was not so bad. There was heaps of it, and we all were fairly peckish. Thanks to my remarks I suppose, Bulkeley sat at the far end of the table from Celia, Gibbons and de Brissac were on either side of her, and I was near by. The conversation was very interesting and hopped about a good deal. The little Edwards did not contribute very much to it, nor Mrs Carstairs, who seemed rather a silent little soul, but they all laughed a lot and were very thoughtful about handing things and passing the salt and such-like, and enjoyed themselves. Fatty Bellew told us some of the same stories that he had told us on the car over again, but they had grown a good deal since then. He described his dinners of dried sea-lion at Klondyke, and how when he wanted a drink of beer he did not drain a flagon of it off (suiting the action to the word) but bought it in hard lumps by the pound, nibbled a piece off and sucked it and had toothache for ten days. I saw a red gleam in Dan's eye but it subsided and nothing happened.

Bulkeley and Fatty swopped tales of narrow squcaks they both had, and the Frenchman contributed some too about the French Congo. He was a very entertaining man, widely read, and travelled, a great financier and philanthropist. The other occupants of the dining-room eyed our party with interest. They seemed to be mostly old professory-looking people with their wives and looked as if they had settled down there to hibernate through the summer.

De Brissac looked at them through his monocle, and said that if they were the type of professors we went nap on, it explained why our educational system was giving trouble. He said they looked as old as the buildings. For himself he admired old buildings, so grey, so venerable, but he disliked old professors, and old theories, and it seemed you could not have the one without the other in the Universities.

Edward Howard stood up for the place. He said there was lots of good up-to-date knowledge to be got at a University and the older the professor the more up-to-date very often. But he said that unfortunately in his time and in the set he was in there was a pretty general idea that it was waste of time to work.

Gibbons said when he first came to Oxford that he made up his mind to work and wasn't going to let anyone put him off, and that even if the College courses were not all they might be you could easily get the latest books and latest information about everything if you made friends with the right professors and dons. There was too much talk about the inferiority of our system over here, and men were spoon-fed with information instead of being made to hunt around for it a bit. He said rather grandiloquently, that genius was its own trustee and could safely be left to find the knowledge most suited to its own needs without much help from anyone.

Rosenberg declared that the great drawback was that the Universities did not give proper facilities for the study of movements of gold and bullion, with the

object of facilitating international commerce. If the authorities would only inquire into the subject scientifically one would be able to go to one's club in safety without some old buffer who knew nothing about it dragging one into a quarrel about Free Trade *versus* Protection, and life would be almost worth living. It was a subject with fixed and immutable laws like anything else, only no one would take the trouble to find out what they were. He believed that this was due to snobbishness on the part of the Universities and that they feared that any knowledge thus gained might be brought to bear on commerce and this thought was anathema to them. "How is it," and he raised one plump hand impressively, "that so much is known about astronomy, in spite of its terrible difficulty and abstruseness? Why don't the astronomists, instead of trying to find out what the people on Mars live upon and think about or worrying about the geological formation of the mountains of the moon, try and find out something about this old orb of ours, and make some discoveries which would help to make things better for mankind? That would be doing something really useful!"

"And what about languages!" said the Frenchman, gesticulating in his turn. "Look at me, I do not wish to boast, but I speak six languages including my own."

"And I four," said the tenor hoarsely.

"And yet the Englishman hardly takes the trouble to speak his own."

"Do you hear that, Peter," said Dan maliciously.

"Some of my nicest friends in this country do not open their mouths to speak more than four or five times a week. But *enfin*—if it suffices them——" He shrugged his shoulders. "If Madame will forgive my saying so," he continued, "your friends seem to talk so much more than most of their fellow-countrymen."

"Do you hear that, Dan?" I said maliciously.

"*Mais non!* It is a compliment; I like it. It is ver' nice and makes one feel quite at 'ome."

"Thank you, sir," said Dan to him, glancing at me sideways. "It's very nice of you to put it that way. But in spite of what our friend Gibbons says education is under a cloud nowadays. It is considered bad form to know anything that might possibly come in useful later."

"There may be a LITTLE in what you say, Dan," said little Gibbons cheerily, "but, I repeat, it all depends upon the man himself. If he is weak-minded enough to let other people influence him and put him off studying, it's jolly mean of him to put all the blame on the professors or the University."

"Well, in some ways I agree with you, Mr Gibbons," said Celia, "there are no such things as reach-me-down or ready-made opportunities, they are all home-made. But for all you say to the contrary I agree in the main with Dan. I do not think that men nowadays pay enough attention to the developing of their minds in useful directions. Something should be done to make education fashionable. My idea is that we ought to get up a petition to some of the Duchesses, the prettiest ones, to take it up and push it along. What do you say, Ada Lamb?"

"The Duchesses," said Miss Lamb, and she probably knew, for she is a great charity worker, "have backed up so many good enterprises that their influence is almost worn out and they themselves are almost worn out too"

"If you'll listen to me a moment," Dan exclaimed, "I'll tell you in a jiffy what should be done. You don't want respectable people to take the movement up. It's too much respectability which has swamped it. If you could persuade people that it was *outré* or rapid to know a tremendous lot it would catch on like wildfire. If some of the people with influence—like you, Gibbons" (Gibbons shook his head deprecatingly)—"would induce some fast but fascinating section of Society, some of the best worst people in fact, or do I mean the worst best people, or even some members

of the Variety Stage—to take it up seriously, the thing would be booming before you could turn round. Anything booms if there is a spice of naughtiness attached to it."

"Booms—booms. Vat is dat?" said the Frenchman.

"I'll explain it to you afterwards," I said across the table.

"I'm perfectly right in what I say. I know what I am talking about. Wasn't it tried in the time of Charles the Second? Wasn't his Court at once the wickedest, the most amusing and the most cultured in the whole world? No one dare show his nose there unless he could prove that he was educated and pretend that he was depraved. Learning was at its zenith, ignorance and stupidity were tabooed. Education flourished as it never has done since, and it was all due to Charles the Second's keen sense of humour. He knew how to popularise it, and did so. Why, there is just as much wickedness as ever in the world to-day, but no one makes any attempt to put it to any practical purpose!"

The Frenchman screwed his monocle more firmly in his eye and looked at him.

"Il est épatant," he said admiringly to us. "Continuez, mon chèr," to him.

Dan was excited by his approval and continued to air his ludicrous views on this and other subjects, to de Brissac who drew him out. Little Gibbons sat listening to them and chuckling as they grew wilder and wilder. I said, "You know more about all this than anyone else here and yet you say the least. How on earth did you manage to get here? I never thought Sir Horace would let you escape. You and he must be two of the busiest people there are——" I was idly playing with the stem of my wine-glass as I spoke.

"Oh, I had no difficulty in making it right with the old boy. I explained it to him and he quite saw it, that I don't come out with Mrs Carmichael to enjoy myself——"

"Mister Gibbons!" Celia said, raising her eyebrows. She had just overheard the remark.

"Oh, oh!! What's that I've said!! I beg your pardon, Mrs Carmichael. You mustn't take it that way. Dear me, what a stupid speech to make. It sounds so rude. No! but he and I always say we do not look upon time spent in your society as wasted time. On the contrary we consider we often profit by it. Just look at my shirt cuff," and he shot it out and I saw it had a whole lot of little pencil notes on it. "Do forgive me!" He folded his hands and held them out towards her in mock despair.

"All right, Mr Gibbons. I'll forgive you on one condition. That is if you will promise to speak to Sir Horace about that matter I laid before you."

Gibbons ran his long fingers through his crisp hair and looked rather worried.

"By all means, if you really wish it. But why ask me to do it? Why on earth don't you ask my Chief yourself? Get him to come out and give him a good dinner, and ask him everything you have a mind to."

"Ah—h! I've tried that often, but nothing comes of it. It's no use inviting these big pots to dine out and giving them Veuve Cliquot and surrounding them with cheery people. They get thoroughly optimistic and jovial and when you confide in them and ask them to do something and tell them the country will go to the dogs if it's not done, they only pooh-pooh you, and tell you you are imagining things. I know better than that. The thing is to get at the people who work with them—people like yourself, Mr Gibbons—they have access to them at all times, especially when they are tired and depressed, and if you want a suggestion to sink in and take root, that's the time to drop it in. If a piece of adverse criticism is repeated to a tired man it rankles and worries him, and human nature being human nature, he will pass it on to his colleagues to worry them too, and the things get inquired into. Now, you can see Sir Horace at all times, and I can't."

"I see him when he is tired and depressed only too often, worse luck," said Mr Gibbons, looking at his plate. "I wish you would tackle him yourself."

"But what's the good? I did ask him to do something last time he came to my house, right at the end of dinner too. He said, 'Yes—decidedly yes!'—but I looked at him and saw him making up his mind not to do it. If you won't ask him to do it, will you get his views for me on the subject? That would be some help."

"That means a lot of work for me. It will take me at LEAST three days to get him to say what he really thinks."

"Why three days?" said Bulkeley from his end of the table, catching the drift of the conversation. "Why not say straight out?"

Bulkeley, I could see, was used to blurting out whatever he thought on the instant, if one could gauge him by his face and neck.

"Well," said Gibbons answering him, "my Chief is a leetle curious in some ways. Understand me, I'm not saying anything about him I shouldn't. Anyone who comes near him realises this as well as I do."

"Yes, quite so."

"The first time I ask his opinion of a thing he generously gives it to me at full length. He says exactly what he thinks. The second time I ask him he also tells me exactly what he thinks—but it is diametrically opposed to what he told me the first time. The third time——"

"Yes?"

"— he tells me what he REALLY thinks, free from all bias or prejudice, or one-sided viewing, poised justly between the two, and perfectly wonderful. You see he knows and reads everything, knows and reads everybody, he's seen everything and been everywhere and there's no one like him anywhere. It's a long process, but well worth it."

"Goodness gracious," said Celia, "does it always take you as long to find out his point of view?"

"Oh no! For if you live a lot with a person you begin to know what they will think of one thing by what you know they think of another. And you can also learn to FEEL what a person thinks without asking them, and this saves a lot of time. But so far we have not turned our attention to this idea of yours, Mrs Carmichael. It's quite a new departure."

Here the Tenor suddenly gave a series of short sharp barks, like a Pomeranian which has been kept waiting too long for its food. I looked at him searchingly, and when at last we rose from the dinner-table I went round the hotel and collected all the hot-water bottles I could find, put them in his room, and had a large fire lit, and then gently persuaded him to go up and get to bed.

Then I came down and found the others, who were settling down to bridge in the first-class waiting-room —I mean drawing-room. After I'd been there a few moments I heard a row upstairs. I went to investigate. He was throwing the bottles all out into the corridor and saying things in husky Russian to the chambermaid, and she was giving him a piece of her mind.

"What was that funny noise?" said Celia.

Next morning (having as you may guess found a place to lay my weary head) I was sitting on the side of my truckle bed, with my motor coat on over my pyjamas, reading some extremely illuminating articles I had found in some old newspapers which had been used for packing my things. Old newspapers exercise an extraordinary fascination over me. They are infinitely more interesting than a to-day's paper ever is, or a yesterday's; even the advertisements are better. There are greatly superior articles in them; articles on bimetallism, or the electrification of soil with a view to the increase of the yield of cereals per statute acre in different climates, or the average measurements of the craniums of the mentally deficient

as compared with the mentally efficient, or perhaps with luck something about the Panama Canal and its vast possibilities. There is no comparison between a to-day's paper and one that is six to nine weeks old. I know this failing of mine for I've missed so many trains owing to it and everybody who packs for me has strict orders only to use plain white paper to wrap around my things. But O'Hara must have run short of it, last Saturday.

I was quite absorbed in one when I heard sudden quick steps up the stairs and, hardly waiting to knock at the door, Dan burst into my room.

"I say, Blenerhassett, you old Chucklehead—— What ARE you doing. Do you know what the time is? Left your watch in Rosenberg's room last night, and no one called you. The blighters. Why, the launch is waiting at Salter's steps and everyone else is ready to start. Had any breakfast? No. Then you'll have to go without. I'll see if I can get you a dry crust of bread. That's all I can do, if that. Here, I'll throw your things in. By Jove, your cold is bad. I'd better leave you out all these handkerchiefs."

"Bud, thed I wond hab eddy for to-moddow."

"I'll lend you some. Buck up or really you'll be too late. It will be quite a jolly day; it's only raining slightly, a sort of thick Scotch mist." He began to squelch and thrust my things into my kit-bag. With my mouth full of tooth paste (I had shaved previously to settling down to read) I asked him not to pack the clothes I was about to put on. It was now that we discovered that everything that was vital to my toilet had been left in Rosenberg's room the night before when I changed there. So I wore a braided morning coat, ditto waistcoat, a motor cap, white flannel trousers, one Leander sock on one foot, and two silk evening socks, to equalise the weight, on the other. I felt that the final touch could be got by borrowing Bulkeley's coat of many odours.

I was tying my tie when:

"What's this?" said Dan suddenly, groping on the bed. "Is this yours?"

He was holding up my Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, which I had brought with me to read, not knowing that there would be plenty of old newspapers in my kit-bag.

"Yes, rather."

"Do you mean to tell me that after Celia's particularly asking us not to bring any more luggage than we could possibly help, you still had the face to lug a great big huge, enormous book like this along?"

"Huge! I don't think it's huge. It's a very nice size. I don't see what you can find to say against it."

It wasn't more than ten and a half inches by seven or eight; I can't stand small print. I like big margins, I must say.

"Oh! I've nothing to say against its size. As a matter of fact it's just right."

He balanced it for a moment or two in his hand with a peculiar expression on his face. "It's exactly the right-sized book to throw at the head of a fellow that annoys you."

I crooked my elbow.

"If you'll get out of the room," I said, "I'll be able to finish dressing myself."

We found them all congregated densely at Folly Bridge where we embarked. It was indeed a fearful business, everybody and everything first well soaked and then thoroughly mixed up. There seemed to be enough impedimenta to have equipped a party of explorers into the Klondyke. Of course Fatty noticed this too. There were cushions and luncheon things, umbrellas and deck-chairs, thermos flasks and Japanese sunshades, chiffon veils and gramophones, and a banjo and baskets and baskets and still more baskets. A few damp cloths which seemed to be lying on everything one touched; lots of coils of rope, oil-cans, records and cameras, and coats everywhere, including of course THE

coat. I couldn't see it but it was unmistakably there.

Everybody was cross, and pretending to be cheerful, which makes it so much more noticeable. Even Miss Lamb was not quite her own sweet self, and this is saying a great deal. The Frenchman looked too miserable for words, and the Russian must have been in a high fever for a large flat hectic spot burned on each flat cheek. I looked at him and decided he was really in for it and probably something complicated too. Bulkeley was of course hovering round Celia, stepping around her in the wet with his tennis shoes. I elbowed him away and drew her attention to the Tenor and said I thought he was very ill indeed. I hoped it would make her anxious and serve to take her thoughts off Bulkeley. It did too for a bit. "Oh, how I wish I had not asked him. I'm quite miserable about it. For goodness sake don't let him get his feet wet. Whatever you do don't let him get his feet wet."

"It's not his feet I am bothering about, Celia. It's his tonsils."

"Yes, yes. But they are one and the same for all practical purposes."

"Excuse me, they're not at all the same thing. He doesn't sing with his feet and he does with his tonsils or maybe it's his diaphragm, I mean."

"If you argue with me now, Peter, I'll begin to cry."

"All right, old lady. I'll say no more."

The launches were being loaded up when Mr Gibbons created a diversion. There is a delusion common to all small men in that they think they can perform prodigies of strength. When no one was looking, and meaning to help things on all he could, he shouldered a large luncheon basket, a very large one indeed, full of crockery, for it rattled. In the other hand he grasped a collection of coats, folding chairs and anything else he could pick up. He put one foot on to the launch as it swung to and fro—mostly fro—to the side of the damp walls. His principal weight was still on the dripping

stone steps. He was just about to transfer it to the boat when he was seen to slip, drop all the coats and stools, and wave his free arm frantically. We all turned to look at him in agonised suspense, convinced that nothing could possibly save him and the lunch from plunging into the dark slimy waters below, full of bobbing corks and occasional scraps of town refuse. We fetched our breaths in gasps. The edge of the hamper touched the edge of the awning. He wavered, he staggered and he slipped. He was gone for a ducat. But no! though he slipped, wavered and staggered, at the last moment he made a supreme effort. He tautened all his little sedentary muscles up, pulled himself together, and stepped boldly on to the damp boards and stood there panting. True to his great name, Mr Gibbons declined to fall.

Celia sat down on a coil of rope completely unnerved. Miss Lamb leant against me and I groped for her waist (didn't find it) the better to support her. Fatty Bellew ran to his help and Bulkeley said, "By Jove, Gibbons! that was a near thing. I was just getting ready to go in after you."

No other annoyance which would reasonably be expected to attend upon the embarkation of a party of pleasure was missing. Various indispensable things were not to be found and people sprinted back to the hotel for them or else shouted incoherent messages down the telephone of the boathouse office.

One of the ladies, little Lady Edward, I think, grazed her ankle most severely in getting on board. Just as we were about to shove off a maid came tearing up to know if we'd tell her the name of the hotel for which we were bound and where they were to meet us with the motors and luggage. She said one maid said it was one place and another said it was another. The chauffeurs were vague. Everyone had left it to someone else to find out and the woman in the bureau said no one had told her. However, we wrote it down for her and at last we did get off, but very much later than we had

intended. When the launch actually moved, a damp cheer broke from us all. I earned a certain amount of gratitude by asking the Tenor to sing the first verse of "Home Sweet Home, there's no place like home." But he explained that his voice now had only two notes in it and he very solemnly asked Celia if she would excuse him. Celia said rather snappishly, she hadn't asked him to sing it, and he seemed surprised and rather offended when everybody laughed.

All of us men of the party set to work to unfurl any small pieces of awning which might have been overlooked, breaking our finger-nails as we plucked at the damp tapes. We also busied ourselves in mopping the wet off the seats so that the ladies should be as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. They would not go into the cabin, saying they preferred the air and our society. Once away from the shelter of the boat-house bend the rain drove wildly against us upon a freshening breeze which felt as if it had been kept on ice all night. It found its way shrewdly into any cracks or crannies in our defences. Bulkeley had thought out a series of strategic movements so as to get near Celia. He managed quite cleverly. In fact I would hardly have credited him with the mental acuteness necessary to the devising of them. It was I supposed the instinct of the hunter as opposed to the clear thinking of the trained mind, for I failed in achieving my purpose, which was the same as his. Soon he was safely ensconced beside her. Though ordinarily very polite and quick to jump up with an "Allow me" and a flash of white teeth, once he got by her, there he stayed. I knocked Mrs Carstairs' hand-bag off her lap on to the floor right in front of him, but he made no attempt to get up and to hand it to her, not even a bogus attempt. I did not like it at all. He was too attentive for my taste and everybody was observing it, I could see, and wondering when the happy day was to be,—I felt sure. He held a huge umbrella over her, altering the angle so as to meet the blasts of rain, tucking in her rugs in the

most possessive way, drawing her attention to anything that could be seen through the other dripping gamps. I looked at the rest. De Brissac and Mrs Carstairs seemed to have found out that they were affinities and talked rapidly and interestedly. Gibbons was talking to Miss Lamb ; sitting in the leeway of her fine proportions, he was warm and dry. Dan and Vera and the little Edwards huddled up together and chatted. Ethel and Rosenberg, the Tenor and Fatty Bellew, who wanted to show us all how to rough it gracefully, had taken possession of the cabin ; and cards had been produced from somewhere and they were doing tricks and enjoying themselves, and gusts of laughter blew out as they did so. I seemed the only outcast. I coughed and sneezed several times to attract Celia's sympathy, but didn't get any, so I gave my mind to the weather and the scenery for both fitted in with my mood only too well.

Everyone knows what the River is like going down from Oxford and I do not intend to say that even upon a day such as this it did not have its attractions. Just now it might have served as a tragic background to the wanderings of that poor mad king, old Lear, for all round, whichever way the eye looked, all was desolate, wild and drear. All of a sudden and before we knew what was happening, a storm arose out of the distance and bore down upon us and beat about us. The waters were leaden and forbidding, and turgid with what their swollen stirrings had fetched off banks or raised from muddied bottoms. Flecks of chill white foam floated in a distraught way now hither, now thither ; our little craft sat deep in the swirling waste, hugging the sides where the clumps of reeds and ashen willows thrashed and whipped each other. The rain tore along the surface of the river, ripping along it, or in backwaters, battering the surface flat. The wind got up and screamed behind the tattered clouds, sending them scudding across the grey sky as if it were urging and

chasing them against their will to some horrid place upon some horrid business. The tall elms were terror-stricken when it tore at their high tops and wrung them and wrung them again. Creaking and bending they seemed prepared to fall.

I'd never seen the like and the Frenchman called out to us in admiration.

The storm lasted a full hour and we quailed in the face of it.

Lock after lock had to be passed and we waited outside each one and hooted and waited some more, and after delays and doubts a surly-looking keeper would come out in oilskins and look at us as much as to say that he was not paid to open lock gates for lunatics, and if we weren't lunatics we wouldn't be out in weather like this.

Then we waited inside the locks getting lower and lower into their cold dank depths, but appreciating a respite from the battling winds. After what seemed an interminable time, punctuated by the swishing of the rain, we'd start off and churn out again and panorama after panorama of dripping, wind-harried park and pasture unfolded itself to our gaze—great trees with leaves weighted with raindrops, bending down to the waters or rising and receding up hill-sides. There were houses with battlemented towers on hill-tops or else houses set upon flat level swards. There were every now and then islands too, big and little, to admire, with sometimes buildings on them. White temples rising out of dense dark growths, with thick alder boles at the edges and whippy willow growths.

And more locks and more panoramas. I ticked the locks off on a little chart I had, and as we waited our turn by the rule of the River we fell in with great big black timber-carrying barges and other tarry traffic of the waterway. They ominously pressed our little laden-down pleasure boat between their towering sides

and the dripping stones of the lock-side. On we slipped by them and ahead of them according to their yells and hoarse directings, when they were prepared to allow us precedence of egress.

The locks got on my nerves. Each one of them was an obstacle between me and my food. I'd had no breakfast and the chilly air had given me a famous hunger. But it wasn't within an hour of the time fixed for lunch, so I sternly held my thoughts to what I saw. I am really less materially inclined than I pretend to be. If I had been a painter, as indeed I wish I had been, some aspect of that stormy river would have gone down to posterity. Or had I been a poet some record would have found its way into a rhyme.

I rhapsodied to myself about it all, and reminded myself that this was the river of all rivers. The main artery that fed the very bosom of England. The pageant of her history, in parts at all events, had been played upon its banks. Many and many a fight it had witnessed and washed away the traces afterwards. Kings and nobility had met to sign charters to free men ; State barges had floated up and down it, trailing gold-worked velvets and trappings in it. Little princesses must have bathed in it and hidden in the reeds when people came that way. I was warmly wrapped up in a waking dream. I thought of all these things and felt a sentimental pricking and tingling about the eyes and nose. This was the signal for my cold to reassert itself and suddenly I sneezed violently again and again and again.

Miss Lamb, who had, I think, kept one kindly but shortsighted eye on me, ever since we left London, jumped up quickly and, before I could defend myself, picked up a coat that was lying near by and threw it clumsily but tenderly about me. I drew back as she did so, for it was THE coat and the damp seemed to have cheered it up and made it—oh ! so much worse. It flapped across my face.

"Dear Mr Blenerhassett, your cold is so bad. Now don't protest, you must keep warm."

Bulkeley called out in his well-bred roar "Yes, do have it. It's a splendid coat. Nothing ever gets through it, I can tell you that."

I should think not.

I thanked them both freely and lit a cigarette. The wind had by now subsided and I could keep a match going. I pulled hard at my cigarette and as soon as they looked the other way I let the horrible thing slip down gradually, and kicked it savagely under my feet. Bulkeley ought to be horse-whipped, firstly for keeping such a thing, and secondly, for bringing it into ladies' society at a pic-nic. I noticed that though he pressed it upon other people he took good care not to wear it or even go near it himself. The psychology of millionaires always interested me. I wondered if one should not pray in church to be delivered from the danger of becoming one. They are strangely horrid people so very often.

Fortunately the weather was improving. Feeling that it had done all that it could to annoy us and content to have spoilt our morning for us, it now took it into its head to take a distinct turn for the better. In a surprisingly short time we had churned our way into calm waters. The sun burst through rather half-heartedly at first, but getting stronger every moment, so that as we turned another bend or two we found ourselves positively basking in it. We began to move our cramped, stiffened limbs and stretched our cramped and cracking joints. Some feeble jokes made their appearance, dry cigarettes and biscuits were passed out of the cabin, and when a bottle of cherry brandy and glasses were passed out too, a wave of enthusiasm passed over the company. It was Rosenberg's splendid idea and we drank his health and voted that he was the life and soul of the party and entirely indispensable to it.

The unaccustomed liqueur unlocked Mrs Carstairs' pretty, though usually silent mouth. As we passed a backwater there was a momentary glimpse of a swan

and her cygnets and she told us a strange story of a lonely swan she had once heard of, the last survivor of a large family. He lived alone for years, she said, until some kind person took pity on his condition and brought him a full-fledged companion. Not long afterwards, some people walking on the shores of the lake saw him struggling with her, and before anyone could reach them, he had held her head under water till he drowned her.

"How human," said little Ethel, in a very small voice, and then everybody laughed and said they must have more cherry brandy because it was such a very sad story.

Rosenberg put his salmon-pink nose out of the cabin again, and asked Celia what she thought of doing about food—were we to lunch ashore or on board? as if it were to be the latter it would be a terribly tight fit. Celia unfolded her plan. A friend of hers who owned a portion of the river bank on both sides had given her permission to lunch in the grounds of her house. The house itself was shut up or we might have gone there, but the grounds were lovely and there were some old Roman and Saxon remains which would delight M. de Brissac, who was something of an archæologist. The hotel where we were to put up that night was not more than a few miles distant, but as it was a pic-nic she did not propose to go there till later in the day. As soon as lunch was over we were to explore farther down the river still and to come back to the hotel in time for dinner. After dinner we would float about in punts, for it very obligingly lay right upon the water's edge.

She thought we must be getting near the spot, so the launch tooted gaily to warn the birds and little fishes of our approach, for there was nothing else about. We all stamped and moved about cheerily and warmed up by the cherry brandy and the biscuits we became almost hilarious.

Dan thoughtfully drew attention to my costume (for I had carelessly opened my coat to let it flap about a bit and get quite dry). One and all, they fairly screamed. I could not see it, and I told them so. It was no joke

for me as I felt an awful fool. I gave them a short lecture upon humour and I said there was no doubt that the English as a race could only see the funny side of sad things, and that they made no attempt at all to see the funny side of funny things. Speaking as an Irishman I said this was so, and it was a pity.

"Yes," says Dan, "the difference between the English and the Irish is that the English see the funny side of sad things, but the Irish don't see the funny side of anything."

"You don't know anything about Ireland, Dan, so don't lay down the law about it."

"That shows all you know about me, Peter. My people went over there five hundred years ago."

"Aw—is that so, Dan. Well——"

I lit another cigarette and after a short pause "Did they have a good passage," I said bitingly.

That left the laugh on Dan for a bit, but not for long, for he became very popular at my expense by pointing to my odd socks and by pretending to be about to throw my solitary white buckskin boot overboard, because he said it reminded him of the lonely swan. Unfortunately for me he had left it out of my bag and brought it along in his coat-pocket. He then told them of all the trouble I had taken over my packing and described it carefully, and got all the others to declare that what had happened was a judgment on me for having nutty tendencies. Celia was studying the landscape attentively, and she called out to me:

"Peter, you've stayed here with the Addisons. You know the look of the place. Isn't that it?"

"Yes, there's the boathouse, you can just see it. Dear me, it's years since I stayed here, but I remember every detail. I spent a most enjoyable summer here. They had SUCH a pretty girl staying with them."

"Why, you never told me about it, Peter," said Celia surprised. "How is that? Who was she?"

"Oh, never mind. But she was CHARMING. We spent such a lot of time in that old boathouse, you see

there. And the Battens had a nice house lower down the River, and they had a VERY pretty girl staying there too." I had one eye on her. "Yes"—I wagged my head in a devil-may-care manner, and smiled cannily—"yes—I oscillated pretty freely between the two places all that summer, I can tell you."

"Are you quite sure that oscillated is the right word, Peter?" said Dan maliciously. "Don't you think you mean osculated, old chap?"

There were more screams of laughter at my expense. However I put up with them gracefully, and looked as if I could tell more, an I would, but I wouldn't.

Celia said frigidly that she did not consider that Dan's joke was at all in good taste, and giving me a stony look, turned the conversation by asking us what we thought of the place.

We were just getting close to the boathouse and preparing to land, when she called to the man at the stecring gear to hold on a bit.

Some of the party were saying that the house and grounds on the riverside were charming, but that the place was a good deal spoilt by having no nice view on the other side, only a bare stretch of fields, the towing path and some iron railings. I recollected that this blank piece had made an impression on me when I had stayed there, and I had thought it a great blemish.

It seemed to worry Celia, and she said she did not like the idea of our having that bare outlook before us while we were lunching; it would spoil everything, and she called upon us all to say what we thought. We were all far too hungry to bother about scenery, and said so, but she wouldn't let us land until we had turned it over in our minds. She said no pic-nic could possibly be a success unless someone paid attention to these details.

Gibbons, who looked as if he had never been hungry in his life, said she was quite right, and that they should be inquired into. Celia asked everybody's advice and didn't listen to it when they gave it. Was it or was it not, nicer to have lunch OPPOSITE the scenery or IN the

scenery, she debated. If you were IN it you couldn't see it properly. Whereas if you sat OPPOSITE to it it was all spread out before you—and you could feast your mind and your body at the same moment.

"My dear lady," said Fatty rather irritably, in whom the privations of the Klondyke had developed a yearning for the fleshpots of civilisation, "you might as well say you'd rather see another woman in a pretty dress than be in it yourself; it's absurd. Do let's get ashore and lunch SOMEWHERE. I'm famishing and all my muscles are stiff."

The Tenor, with the remnants of his voice pleaded for the side with trees, so that if the weather broke again one could at anyrate get shelter, but Celia had already directed the man to put in to the towing path side. There was no proper means of getting off this way, so she was satisfied that it was entirely alfresco. We could so easily have got out in the boathouse, but this way we barked our shins and tore our clothes getting off, and the Tenor went into the squelchy mud well above the knee. Rosenberg bore this trifling with his sacred lunch hour manfully and I always thought well of him afterwards. Baskets were hove overboard, seats, coats, cushions, all the lot were thrown out of the launch. It looked as if it was in eruption. As soon as I saw THE coat appear I escorted it as far as I could from everything else.

Everyone flew about in all directions, calling for corkscrews, begging for pen-knives, hunting for this, that and the other. But the Tenor and the Frenchman stood apart and exchanged unfavourable views in some unknown tongue,—that is, de Brissac was speaking and the Russian was nodding his head violently. He looked towards Celia and I saw something very like aversion in his eyes. I also looked at Celia and saw that she and Bulkeley had resumed their flirtation with vigour and they were both plunging into the same hamper, and getting their hands all mixed up, laughing and fussing as to who should carry this or that dish. I

thought moodily that it would be an unmitigated bore for me to watch them all day going on like this, especially as I had a bad headache coming on. I looked at the sky. A thought struck me, and I walked over to the Tenor who had now withdrawn moodily to the very edge of the river, and stood looking at the rapid stream of it, his head sunk on his chest. The sun had gone in again, more dark clouds had rolled up and the wind was whistling cuttingly. He seemed to be trying to hum something. I listened cautiously—yes—it was *Home, Sweet Home.* My heart smote me. That settled it. Poor fellow, he was naturally very upset at having got this chill. His whole existence depended upon his keeping clear of colds. His future lay between those swollen tonsils. The wet material of his trousers stuck and clung to one leg, outlining it.

"Look here, Hintoff," I said, "I think it would be a very good thing for you if we walked back to the hotel. It's only five miles away—the walk will do you good. You can have a hot bath and something to eat in your room, and go to bed and nurse your cold."

He leapt at the offer and almost embraced me, but I warded him off. He said, what about his hostess, though, would she think him very rude? I promised to square her.

I went over to Celia, who was coquetting with Gibbons and Bulkeley over the carving of a ham. I led her to infer (which is a delicate way of confessing that I told several fibs) that I was dying to see the pic-nic through to the bitter end, but that my one anxiety was to save her anxiety on account of the Tenor. I told her feelingly that I was quite ready to sacrifice my own personal desires and natural craving for innocent enjoyment and if she wished it I would trot the Tenor off and install him safely in the warm hotel there and then, for I was sure he was about to have a serious illness.

"My poor dear unselfish Peter. How splendid of you. Just as we are having such a capital time. What should I do without you? But I really think it is the

only thing to do. You must have some sandwiches. Fancy giving up your lunch! You are the most unselfish man I know." She dived into a tea basket and brought out a pile of sandwiches and squeezed them into my hand affectionately. I took them carelessly as if privations were quite in my line, and said nothing whatever about the whacking lunch I meant to have when I got back to the hotel. I would not labour it now, but I did not mean to allow this piece of abnegation on my part to be forgotten for many a long day, I can tell you. It would come in very useful anon.

We slipped away quietly so as not to draw too much attention to my act of heroism, and struck out rapidly across the fields till we got on to the highroad. By the time we reached the pretty little Riverside Inn hiding coyly in its green ambuscade of big trees and dense surrounding undergrowth, with the foot of its sloping lawn almost in the lapping sheltered waters, we were both glowing with the exercise and both felt the better of it. Hintoff said he thought that if he could get really dry and thoroughly warm he felt he might pull through and sing next week, and so we stamped in at the low little door and loudly called for our hosts. As soon as it was realised that we were the advance guard of the large and exclusive party for which all the best rooms had been reserved, attendants flew about, in all directions. The motors had turned up, the luggage had been unpacked and warm dry things were ready.

Hintoff made no bones about going to his room and did not refuse the battery of hot-water jars this time. I went into the clean little red-tiled kitchen, inspected the joints personally and superintended the loading of a large tray to go up to him. Then I went and paid a call upon the young lady in the brightly shining bar. She was a fine girl, tall, with a lovely complexion and heaps of ripping glossy hair tossed up on top of a very good head. She looked splendid against the rows and rows of little dark shelves lined with jolly bottles all

gleaming and winking away in the dim old background. I ordered stiff grogs for myself and the Tenor, to be made of good old brandy, warranted to leave no aftermath of morning head or furry tongue and with little oddments of clove and nutmeg floating in them.

As she stood sideways she gave me a coy but unmistakable invitation out of one bright eye. I perked up damply and watched her fulfil my double behest with slim and nimble fingers. I reminded myself that if one had time to look for it there was always some appreciation to be found, somewhere; and then she turned full towards me, and I met her eyes as I leant upon the polished surface to pay my count. I drew back in dismay. She had a cast in one but which I couldn't say; for whilst one invited the other repelled. One was coy and held a lark; the other was stony and held a rebuke. It looked across the top of my head out of the door away into the middle distance as if there were no such things as tall men with crinkly hair, that crinkled more because it was a wet day.

It looked at you as much as to say that if any small gallantry suitable to the occasion were attempted that it would be met with a request for an explanation.

I decided it was too risky and went upstairs and changed from head to foot. I put on my tan shoes.

I have hardly space to tell you of the lunch I had. Now that I come to look back upon it I hardly know how I found space to accommodate it all, but I was ravenously hungry. As it progressed or rather disappeared, I solved the problem of the eye. It was the one I had first met that turned out to be at the head of affairs. I had nothing to complain of, everything was done for me, for she was one of the nicest girls I ever met, and I really believe she had taken a great fancy to me, and we chatted amiably between courses. After lunch she settled me down in the little sitting-room reserved for the use of our party. She provided me with hot strong coffee and hot strong grog to follow;

she gave me a book and some matches, found my cigar-case and lent me six of her own clean handkerchiefs. She was a priceless girl. I thought that if I had had the same bent of mind as the late King Cophetua, I might have done worse than propose to her. Still it was not in my way, and after all I decided I'd prefer to marry someone who had not quite so much difficulty with her aspirates.

" By Jove, this is almost like summer," I said to myself as I stretched my legs out to the blaze. I glanced out of the French window at the peep of water and the green lawn and at the gorgeous riverside trees opposite, their leaves shivering in the breeze. Little hop tendrils and clematis shoots framed the picture and clustered and tangled round the old green iron of the verandah. I settled the cushions at my back. I snipped my cigar and lit it. I sipped my coffee and glanced through the Sunday papers, and then I idly opened the book; I hadn't got through two pages before I knew it was the very book to give to a person who had been lured out on a wretched dank summer pic-nic. I suppose they kept nothing but that sort of book at that hotel, and lent them one at a time to their visitors to read, so that they should forget how cold it was outside. It was all about Italy, beautiful laughing cloudless Italy, where the skies were blue and smiled perpetually and the sun blazed without a break. There was no rain in that book at all, only one thunderstorm towards the end clearly dragged in so as to show the writer's command of words and to serve as a background for a foul deed. Everyone was safely under cover and no one got wet except the murderers and the corpse. Otherwise the winds were balmy and caressing and the olive-eyed peasants Beppo and Juliana, Umberto and Suntuzza and so on and so forth, laughed and sang and worked the whiles in the sunny mountains of Tuscany, and dwelt in the little sun-baked, half-ruined villages straggling and clinging on the steep hill-sides, while all below lay the sparkling Mediterranean, tideless yet full of life

notwithstanding, for light craft of every shape and size flitted about and great sea-going liners cut their way through its azure waters. I felt myself getting positively sunburnt while I read about it all. There were palatial villas painted with frescoes outside, also many old palazzos to which one gained entrance by climbing marble stairways. Inside they were hung with priceless tapestries of the Renaissance and pictures of dead princes. Without, the fountains played and made the cool courts cooler, by their plashings ; the people in the story gasped for breath and only wore the very thinnest clothes, never venturing out without large umbrellas to protect them from the glare.

One of the most picturesque Rococo palazzos had been bought by an American millionaire. The heroine, who was his daughter, was quite a woman after my own heart. She was of the same colouring as Celia, dressed divinely and in many ways reminded me of her. She was subject to the same caprices and pretty moods. She was unreasonable too at times, like Celia, but just as in Celia's case, she was a perfectly wonderful and warm-hearted person. The hero also was quite a nice fellow. A good deal older than the heroine, but as I said to myself, it is not disparity of years but of mind that matters.

I skimmed the pages rapidly. Carlo the heroine was taking a long time to make up her mind as to whether she loved the hero or not, but as the wooing took place in such a wonderful climate and in such delightful surroundings, there was no need to hurry. As it was a book one knew it would come right. The hero, strangely enough, was also very like me in his appearance generally. He was well read and sensitive, his nature was deep and such as to make him liable to be misunderstood by those about him. The only way in which he differed from me was that he had a moustache and that I am clean-shaven. I shaved him and read on.

The author was very gifted, for the whole book seemed to breathe a subtle aroma as of orange bloom

and olive plantations. By some trick of the wording of his sentences when he described the ripening vineyards and the ilex and cypress groves with their embowered depths, he succeeded in casting a glamour over the senses of his reader. Sometimes a waft of fragrance that made me think of wayside flowers and reminded me curiously of the particular personal fragrance that clung about Celia's belongings, and was quite delicious, seemed to come from it.

One thing I approved of greatly. The author had not had recourse to a very usual but very annoying trick to work up the interest and suspense. He had not given the heroine two strings to her bow. Naturally so beautiful and gifted a person as she had admirers and would-be lovers by the score, and every few pages or so he left you to guess that Prince So-and-so or that swarthy but gallant Marchesi di What's-his-name, and a whole heap of lesser personages were about to propose or had just done so. But as can easily be imagined to one so beautiful as Carlo these things were all in the order of the day and she clearly must have refused them tactfully and convincingly, for these people faded out of the book and were only spoken of again distantly. No ! the hero had the field to himself, and there was no neck-and-neck business with anyone else to make your blood run cold. No English Milord came along with a yacht and letters of introduction, just as things were shaping nicely for the hero and spoiling matters for him by walking with her at the hour of twilight upon the long palazzo terraces where the little formal orange-trees stood like sentinels all in a row, and the suspiring valley below sent up strange little spicy perfumes, borne on the wings of that immortal sprite and go-between of all balmy climes, Romance. As I read, it appeared to me an extraordinary book, and the room seemed full of fragrance. I couldn't understand how it was done. The man was a genius in the handling of words, if he could so carry one with him and by merely describing such things arouse in his perusers the actual

feelings of the things themselves. I wondered at it and followed the tale closely, held by its charm, and suddenly and overwhelmingly the fragrance was there again. I turned a page or two and it was there still more. I rubbed my nose in astonishment and perplexity. I sniffed once—and I sniffed twice—and then I looked at my handkerchief suspiciously, and what do you think? Instead of my own big linen one I saw that it was a little bit of lawn and lace smelling as sweet as could be, which I had been holding to my nose, Celia's little hanky, not mine at all. I remembered now that Celia had dropped it and that I had picked it up just in time to prevent Bulkeley getting hold of it, and I had forgotten to give it back. I laughed immoderately and sniffed at it again and compared its aroma with that of the coat. It was indeed vastly superior.

I glanced out of the window. The rain had once more begun to fall, long and straight, soaking weightily into the little green lawn, with a steady persevering sound as though it had signed a contract to pour steadily for two or three days without ceasing and meant to carry it out to the letter if it possibly could. I poked the fire, took my hot grog off the hob and resumed my reading.

For the moment the love theme became of secondary importance. It fell out that Carlo's father had been taking an interest, as an American naturally would, in the political questions that convulsed Italy. I could see that all was not well in spite of blue skies and blazing sunshine. The country was poor, the government full of factions. The cost of old mistakes was as a heavy burden upon the backs of the poor, who, toil and moil as they might, could not shake off their poverty. Secret societies flourished. The Camorra and the Black Hand undermined the loyalty of a fine people. They met in caves and whispered sedition and swore great oaths. Now the heart of the great intelligent American was sore for the misery he saw about him, and in trying to do something for it he became himself suspect and the

very peasants who lived in the shadow of the palazzo, and who had thriven on his bounty, turned upon him and tried to injure him and his.

One day, walking in a lonely wood, the heroine was set upon by villains and if the hero had not had the infallible and mystic sense that heroes always have when the loved one is in danger, her number would have gone up. But he seized a fast horse, leapt upon it and rode like the wind to her help and sent her assailants packing. Carlo's gratitude was unspeakable and through several chapters I saw it ripen into love. It was delightful. As the story went along she became more and more like Celia and did and said things just as she did. Oddly enough the hero seemed to become more and more like me. I really felt as if I had Celia all to myself for once that afternoon. I paused and looked at the fire and ruminated. No man could consider himself altogether a luckless wight who was so skilful at weaving realities out of unrealities as I. No doubt, said I, if you will look into things carefully, you will see that every kind of life and every kind of character has its compensations and there are more things than meet the eye in this old world. With this I glanced outside and thought how much nicer it was to be in here than out there, and yet I fell to wondering uneasily whether Bulkeley was still hovering around Celia. Perhaps he was tucking her rugs about her in the launch again or buttoning her into her coat, lingering over each button. If so I hoped the coat hadn't too many buttons. A wet pic-nic gives a man such an unfair chance of showing how attentive he can be. From Bulkeley's point of view the weather was ideal. Perhaps at the very moment that I was wooing her ideally in the pages of a book he was proposing to her in the flesh. I plunged into the story again.

Carlo's father had, with the assistance of the authorities, persuaded the peasants of the integrity of his intentions. He helped them to buy out their farms and loaned them money for their maintenance and

cultivation, and now instead of black looks all was joyous and serene again. At night after the day's work was done, the village folk would assemble near the palazzo, and young Giuseppi would unsling his guitar and his liquid luscious notes would rise to the great dark blue vault of heaven, all thickly studded and strewn with stars. In Italy, according to this writer, one literally lived among the stars. At bed and at board they were there; at night so close to earth, so many and so thick behind the tops of the blue-brown mountain slopes. The singing was altogether too much for Celia and me—the hero and heroine—I mean!

Some small crisis in their intercourse left her at his mercy. Her love could not restrain itself, but was written in her face so clearly that even in the pale starlight her lover could read it. Thrilling with the joy of the discovery, glowing with the force of my adoration, I advanced to take her in my arms and hear her sweet confession. . . . I was quite swept off my feet. I felt as if something were going to short-circuit inside me. . . . At that moment I heard a trampling of feet and the sound of many voices laughing and talking. Malediction on it! They had come back. Upon the instant the door of the sitting-room was flung open and Fatty Bellew and Dan burst in.

I threw the book to the other side of the room.
"Pig-dogs!" I said.

Next morning Miss Lamb, Gibbons, Rosenberg and myself boarded the first express to Town. Miss Lamb in a very sporting way got into a smoker with us, and felt rather fast at doing so. Our spirits were quite good for our noses were turned towards home. Rosenberg, through having such a long one, was already part of the way there. Mr Gibbons sat in his corner, immersed in official papers and envelopes with strange seals. I could see his mind was already back at his office before his body too. Rosenberg spoke out plump and plain.

"What a mercy that's over. I always say that no amount of work ever did anyone any harm. It's these holidays that are so dangerous. I don't think I shall ever take one again if I live through the attack of pneumonia that I expect I shall develop soon. Miss Lamb," he leant towards her, "I've got a favour to ask of you."

"Yes, Mr Rosenberg," the good creature beamed all over.

"I've got a hard day before me, and I had a very hard bed last night. I want to have forty winks before I get up to Town. Do you mind?"

"Not at all, dear Mr Rosenberg. Certainly not."

"Well then," he grinned amicably at her, "you must promise not to scream with pleasure every time you see a Norman church, and wake me to come and look at it."

"No, no, indeed, I won't."

"That's all right," I said. "We'll be as quiet as mice. I say, Rosenberg."

"Yes, my dear boy?"

"Thank goodness this train doesn't have to go through any locks!"

ADELAIDE

"ARE you quite sure, Peter, that you don't mind having given up your day's shooting?"

"Quite sure, Celia. Adelaide rather interests me, you know."

I helped her to get into, or I might more truly say embark in, her limousine. It was a hefty car, more like a man-of-war. The big whitened tyres slung at the sides looked as if they were life-buoys, and should be marked "s.s. Celia."

"Still, it's a shame to have to miss your day's sport. I hate asking you to come in a way, and yet I hate going alone to see Adelaide, for there are such awful gaps in the conversation if I do. With three it's not so bad, as when two of us have said the same thing and agreed with each other and said yes, the other person can repeat it, and the first two can agree and say 'yes' to it, and that fills up the time nicely."

"By the way, what are we going to talk about to-day? Hadn't we better decide beforehand, and then we are less likely to feel paralysed; for if our ideas do run short we will have something to fall back on."

"There's always the dog fight."

"Oh, surely not, Celia. That must have happened three years ago."

"Never mind, it's still quite fresh and perfectly safe. You can examine the marks on Jumbo's legs, slang the vicar's dog as much as you like and even say a few unkind things about the vicar for keeping such a dog. Remember we are in the country and it is nothing to spin a dog fight out for three years' conversation. Besides there is always the town house."

"Yes, there is that, but on the whole, Celia, I'd prefer

to leave that to you. You are so much cleverer at feeling your way than I am. I might easily say the wrong thing."

"Yes, better leave it to me."

I must explain that Adelaide (I beg her pardon, Mrs Mountjoy) is one of those people with whom you must be very careful in conversation. She is on the look-out for what is known as "digs." Why anyone should want to have digs at her I can't make out. I certainly don't. But she spends far too much time in looking out for them, guarding against them and preparing to meet them with counter digs. So it's quite interesting in a mild way to go and see her. Any reference to her town house, when you go and see her in the country, if you are not very careful, may be regarded as a dig. Why I don't know. Any reference to her country house may be regarded as ditto when you go and see her in her town house. So it becomes a sort of game of Tom Tiddler's ground to speak of these houses at all. As far as I could analyse it or make head or tail of it she had somehow got it into her head that her friends had some fault to find with her because she did not spend nine months of the year in one and nine months of the year in the other, though if she had stopped for one moment to make a simple calculation she would have realised it was impossible, and realised that her friends must realise it too. I could never fathom this digging theory at the back of her mind about the houses, unless it was that she felt that as she was a widow she had no right to monopolise two houses. But as she and I and everyone else all know many people who think nothing of monopolising three, four or even five houses and only live a few weeks in the year in each, I can't see why this should have troubled her. It was curious then that there should have been in her an undercurrent of satisfaction at being the possessor of two fine houses, and of being sufficiently wealthy to own and run them. And that is where the subtle interest of the game came in. Whenever we went

to see her, we had to find out whether it was her day for being on the look-out for digs on the subject, and for feeling guilty about it, or whether it was a day when the undercurrent of satisfaction was in full working order, and whether we could gently and indirectly lead her to infer that we were impressed by her being able to afford it. Celia, who always likes to get on the right side of people, is always feeling about for an opening to flatter her on this point, and does a lot of scouting ahead of me, and I heave in according as the land lies.

Apart entirely from this digging business, which is only a side issue, I find Adelaide in her way quite an absorbing character study. She is the most PRIVATE person I know. Can you follow me ? There seems to emanate from her entire person a feeling of complete and entire privacy and cut-offness from the rest of the people in the world. I've never met anything else like it anywhere or in anyone else. I cannot convey to you the impression she produces on me, and I think on most people, without using the word " private." You feel somehow that all the circumstances and happenings of her life take place *in camera.* They are blameless beyond belief, but that makes no matter. All that there is to her and of her transpires in this way. For instance, she never discourses of her doings, large or small, but acts and says nothing. It's all a bit uncanny and seems as though she had no wish for any sympathy or understanding. She never appeals to anyone for an opinion on such things as we most of us do, saying to one another, " I did so-and-so, or else I said so-and-so, or I am thinking of doing so-and-so ; what do you think about it ? " You know the sort of thing I mean. You may not care a jack-straw what people think about it or even dream of taking any advice they proffer, but it gives one a sort of dim satisfaction to do it and seems to help one. Thinking things out for oneself is a lonely business ; indeed all life is a lonely business, and this kind of talk and conversation with one's fellows, taking them a little into one's confidence and

asking for a little of their sympathy, or backing, though it's only in words, is vaguely comforting. I don't suggest that one should go to the lengths to which some people go in asking for the opinion of others or their help in choosing a line of action to take up. For some people are never satisfied unless they are constantly asking their friends to form themselves into a sort of impromptu jury, to empanel themselves and sit in judgment on all their actions and wait feverishly for their verdict, instead of deciding for themselves and doing the best they can and being content to leave it at that.

The only point on which she is at all vulnerable and comes in touch with the outside world is upon the subject of the houses, why I don't know. When I shake her limp private hand and put the stereotyped question "How do you do?" I feel as if I had taken an unpardonable liberty in inquiring after anything so entirely and purely personal as her health. And she answers me in a distant chillsome way, which rebukes me and convinces me of my hardihood, "Oh, quite well, thank you. How are you?" her gentle voice trailing into silence, and pitched on a tone that indicates that to a person of her intense privacy the health of a mere outsider like myself doesn't matter in the very least. I feel, with Alice, like a candle that has been blown out. If by chance I did not do well, I would not think of telling her about my earache or headache or other ache, for I'd know it couldn't interest her. Not that she isn't quite charming in many ways. She is graceful and distinguished. You would pick her out in any crowd with her grey hair and look of elegant privacy and her gentle slow speech and her gentle slow movements. When I am with Adelaide it always feels like Sunday for there is about her and all her surroundings an air of Sabbath quietness, an atmosphere of repose and something more than repose. A suggestion that all the world's affairs are hung up for the present and a sensation that things are in a state of complete poise.

ADELAIDE

Her house lies about a mile or two from Aunt Anne's in Somerset, and we were staying there. Aunt Anne you remember is also Celia's adopted aunt. As we drew up at the portico I fancied that Celia's driver pulled up a little more silently and circumspectly than usual. I expect I was right in thinking this, for this emanation of quietness and privacy of Adelaide's seems to penetrate through the walls of her house and you get a whiff or waft of it before you actually enter it. Celia rang carefully and we waited for exactly the correct number of moments that it would take a correct man-servant to get from the high-class housekeeper's room to the hall door. It was opened dexterously and swiftly and Adelaide's butler received us. Very graciously, for he knows we are thoroughly nice people with backgrounds of nice relatives and even great wealth in Celia's case.

"Yes, Mrs Mountjoy is in." We had no need to ask the question, for we were there by her invitation, put my hat and stick silently and carefully on a table whilst he waited decorously, and then we followed him into Adelaide's own special room. He was a pearl among butlers as we both knew.

Kings have shaken hands with me, and I have even been told off to take minor royalties down to supper, but nothing has ever given me the feeling of suppressed exhilaration that I get when Adelaide's butler greets me amiably, or very thoughtfully so far forgets himself as to ask how I am keeping. I feel positively unnerved when he smiles at me. Candidly, the approval of one of these first-class servants is somethng worth having if you can possibly get it, but it is not easy.

We waited in silence in Adelaide's room, and though it is not a large room, it is very impressive. In some sense, it gives one the feeling that one is in a presence chamber. I trod very carefully across it because I would have felt that if by accident any slight pieces of fluff off the carpet (Adelaide's carpet) came off on my boots it would be taking an even more unwarrantable

liberty than in asking after her physical well-being. Not that there was any likelihood of any fluff coming off though, for throughout, Adelaide's house is carpeted with fine but sombre rugs; valuable rugs from which long and long ago, all the colour and substance and *joie de vivre* had been trodden out by centuries of brown naked feet or else by mincing old world shoes, if the rugs had already sojourned long this side of the world. The room contained a few nice pieces of old furniture, on which gleamed with a quiet but intense brilliance some perfectly kept bits of old well-chosen silver. I examined these. Things can be polished till they disappear and these pieces looked as if this would be their ultimate end. I fancied since I last saw them that they had actually decreased in size. We waited, as I say, some little time. If it hadn't been Adelaide we would have said she was unpunctual in putting in an appearance, but this couldn't be so in Adelaide's case. You have only to look at her to see that she is a punctual person. It's strange, but some people can keep others waiting for half-an-hour at a time or miss their appointments altogether and yet not be a bit unpunctual. It's entirely a matter of appearance and general manner. If you are unlucky enough to be born with an unpunctual look about you, even if you always arrive ten minutes before the time, it makes no difference. You'll get no credit for it.

Presently the door pushed gently open and I jumped up to greet my hostess, but it was only the dog. We hadn't noticed he wasn't there before, but now we remembered that we would probably have to talk about him, and we felt glad he had come. I cheered up a bit, and acting upon impulse, I drew a chair slightly nearer the fire, for it was a cold day. But Adelaide's dog came right near me, close to my ankles and told me (not in so many words, of course, but quite clearly) that each chair had its proper place in that house, and was not to be moved by any mere outsider, thank you. I hadn't time to explain to him as clearly as I should

have liked that I considered my legs were very private property indeed, because at that moment Adelaide entered the room. She greeted us with cold enthusiasm, shook hands and kissed Celia—almost.

Celia and she though they are old schoolfellows only see one another a few times during the year, and by rights should have many things to talk of. But I suppose Adelaide feels that if one talked much and of many things that one MIGHT have to change one's views, and that would be troublesome, so the conversation kept within a limited radius. It didn't by any means languish though. This was one of her good days and we referred to the two houses quite openly and Celia by a master-stroke of daring complimented her on the convenience of the situation and she was quite pleased and agreed almost heartily. From that we drifted to a little chaste scandal (this was a day of days) curiously impersonal and disembodied. She even referred archly to some doubtful escapades of some well-known ladies of a well-known chorus, speaking of them as ballet girls. I thought how pleased they would be to hear themselves so described. There was a story about one which had been going around town for about four years, and she told us this in quite a little twitter as something very new and very daring. It hadn't been very thrilling even when it was new, but we pretended we hadn't heard it before and laughed over it with her. But not in a ribald way and not for long. We laughed rather in a deprecating way, pulling ourselves up suddenly and looking in a gravely tolerant way at the floor so as not to let it appear that we REALLY condoned such goings on. We only laughed in a "such is life" way, and "boys will be boys," and "peers will be peers" way. Nothing more, I assure you.

Then that topic having run its course and having yielded all it could without its being discussed in a spirit of genuine interest or comment on our common human failings, we dropped it. For with Adelaide there is not any of that no man's land which with most

of us separates our ideas of what is right from our ideas of what is wrong. Her boundary lines are clearly and uncompromisingly worked out and marked with nice plump round stones at intervals, white-washed regularly so that they will glimmer in the darkness, and so that no one can mistake them or have any excuse for overstepping them or losing their way. It amuses me that it is all so exactly like the drive of her own well-arranged country house. She would be shocked beyond measure if Celia and I were to hesitatingly confess to a rather confused frontier line upon matters of this sort in passing judgment upon our friends generally. She would be horrified if I were to describe to her how sometimes I—and even Celia too—stagger about with these great stones, lifting them and changing their positions, moving them now forward and now backward, trying to place them properly and justly, and mopping our brows with the exertion. I envy Adelaide, I must say. What a lot of thinking and puzzling this attitude of hers must save.

Tea was brought in, during which time we veered to the subject of the dog and the dog fight, and we examined the marks, now so nicely healed, only that the hair would not grow properly on them. The tea-tray was very refined and high class, set out with more silver things in danger of being polished away and a priceless lace cloth. A nicely warmed china dish (not overheated) was handed round with a whole family of little well-behaved buttered scones in it, small and prim. I took one, feeling it was a pity to separate them, and ate it carefully. The tea was refined and fragrantly thin and clear. I sat and sipped and swallowed this tea of Adelaide's as if it were some marvellous distillation, the essence of some rare plant that only bears tea leaves, say, once in a hundred years; and yet in my other friends' houses I sit and gaily gulp down cup after cup of tea (probably just the same at four or five shillings the pound) and think nothing of it. But of course, this is Adelaide's private tea.

After tea Celia and she were still speaking of the dog fight and the vicar's incomprehensible behaviour throughout, and meantime my eyes wandered about. In doing so they observed something that they had not noticed before and that was that even the view you get through Adelaide's speckless thick plate-glass windows is totally different in character from the view you get out of anyone else's windows. It is a subdued and eminently private landscape your eyes rest upon. Even nature seems to have come under her calm domination. The trees seem quieter and more serious here than elsewhere. The winds of March, the gales of the equinox all become more decorous when they buffet against the respectable brickwork of Adelaide's house, and forget to toss the boughs about. There are creepers on the walls outside, but they are trimmed and tidied so that no tendrils can tap insistently on the panes in a little spring breeze. The gardener, who is a thoroughly religious man of sound political views and an Episcopalian, cuts them all away. He also is a very private person. I never got near enough to see him thoroughly, or ask his advice about planting runner beans, for when he saw me coming he melted away into a potting shed. He has a great many under-gardeners, but they have the same dislike to being seen as he has. I saw a whole heap of them one day, but they got off and away in the stubble just like a covey of partridges.

From the window my glance shifted to Adelaide. There is one very curious thing about her I would like to mention, and which I can't make out. It is in the matter of teeth. She doesn't laugh or smile very often, but when she does she reveals a set of gay little girlish teeth, not a bit private, quite thoughtless-looking and young. Whenever I see her I look at them and feel a bit baffled, and whenever I see her I speculate about them, and what I believe happened is this, that when Adelaide started getting bigger, they somehow got left behind and never grew up with the rest of her. It's the oddest effect to see her lips part in a dry conven-

tional smile and then see those white teeth give the rest of her the lie direct. They are not teeth at all, but a row of little problems, Celia and I have long since decided.

I was offered another cup of tea, but feared it might seem vulgar and greedy to have two, so I refused though I was thirsty. I was dying for a smoke, but it wasn't suggested and I did not like to ask. Then there was a silence, just what we had dreaded. It may not have been so long as it felt, but it seemed to last ages. Then Celia and Adelaide both started to say something simultaneously, and both stopped, and both begged each other's pardon, and each wouldn't speak before the other and then both of them I fancy got nervous and forgot what they were going to say and matters were at a deadlock, and I suddenly remembered that I had read somewhere that leeches live for seventeen years. It was absolutely the only thing I could think of. Like Mother Hubbard's cupboard, my mind was bare. I can find heaps of things to say, as anyone can tell you, when there is no need to say anything. But I told them both this as if it was a most remarkable thing. Adelaide drew it politely into the cold storage of her mind and left it there to perish (quite rightly) and Celia pretended to be very surprised and interested and said it was a thing everyone ought to know, and did they keep leeches at the zoo, and if so she'd go and inquire into their habits more closely, for an animal that lived so long must end by getting quite intelligent, she thought. Though it wasn't a subject that led to much she made the most of it and it got us over what might have been a very awkward pause.

I saw that Celia felt she must ask Adelaide to ring for the car before we all lost our tongues altogether—and I saw her hunting round the room with her eyes for something to fill in the time while the car was coming round. They fell on a new piece of old furniture in one corner, and she said how nice it was, judging the talk about it would just last us till we got out. I

had noticed it too and thought of it as a probable topic, but discarded it as likely to fizzle out too soon. For though any remark about a new piece of old furniture would start most people off on an endless exchange of views about periods or prices or the relative honesty and dishonesty of respective dealers and all that, it is not so with Adelaide. She has nothing to tell you about anything that belongs to her. Her pieces are good and sound, but once they are admitted to her house, their past history drops from them. No, their life commences from the moment they become part of her entourage. You see Adelaide does not feel about these things as other people do. You are not asked to enthuse wildly over one of her new acquisitions, or to inquire about it, how and where it was got. If she told you where she got one of her things or what she paid for it, she would be letting you into her private affairs and she couldn't possibly allow that. She doesn't go on wild expeditions to unknown neighbourhoods or slums, after having been weak enough to look through a dealer's catalogue of expensive bargains. She does not get carried away at the sight of a high carved cradle, and buy it feverishly and bring it home the same day and fill it with ferns and flowers. No, if Adelaide filled it with anything she'd fill it with babies, but as far as we know, she is not very fond of them, so there's an end on it. Her way is quite different. She calmly decides to purchase something for some more than usually blank spot in one of those blank houses, and she deliberately sets forth to some well-known furniture shop of undoubted respectability and reputation. She then holds a calm consultation with a restrained man in the shop—the head man when he hears she is there—and he leads her to some suitable things. She looks at two or perhaps three and then—"Yes"—she says deliberately—"Yes—I think that will do. It's quite—nice—quite nice. That little line of beading is such good style, isn't it? Yes, please send it home to me." In due course a cheque, a very respectable and high-toned cheque

indeed, written in a mild, restrained lady-like handwriting, arrives to the restrained man who has made a very restrained profit on the deal, only about five or six hundred per cent. Yes, that is how Adelaide does things. She is quite satisfied with her method. It would go against the grain to do it any other way. She wants something and she is prepared to pay for it, so there is no need to go on a tiresome dusty hunt for bargains. Some people may like to poke around dirty little shops in slums, but it would not suit Adelaide. She doesn't understand that side of life. It may not be her fault as I suppose she hasn't met many people who couldn't afford to pay three times too much for everything they buy. You feel sure that she hardly knows that there are people who have to consider each penny they spend, and get all possible value out of it. She may know it, but it doesn't get really near her. Even if she does know it, it will probably only be from having read books in which some of the characters are poor. And you feel quite sure that she does not realise all the grades and grades there are below these, and lower still, to utter destitution. She has never listened for the thin chink of mean coins hardly earned, worn poor and flat by fingers clutching tightly at them for fear they might be parted too soon from them.

As we drove away I told Celia that she could not consider her life work accomplished unless she reformed Adelaide. Celia's face blanched at the thought and she said that in her wildest moments she had not dared to think of this. I said that the treatment needed was the same as the Selfish Man got in the *Message from Mars*. He was taken out in a blinding snowstorm and subjected to every form of misery and privation until his eyes were opened, and until his own misery linked him up with all the sorrow and wretchedness in the world—and drove him to work at something to try and stem it.

I said I would willingly take her out and lose her in one if Celia would give me the word.

Celia said it might do us both good and she'd think it over and let me know.

We had been back in town about two months when Celia rang me up in some excitement. She said we had made some sort of a—she used a word I couldn't make out—mistake.

"What's that? What sort of a mistake?—oh—unparalleled. Yes, it's not a good word for the telephone, is it? But who or what have we made a mistake about?"

"About Adelaide, of course. I met Mrs Baxter who has such a lot to do with that children's hospital in the East End and she tells me that Adelaide gives them hundreds and hundreds a year, but likes it to be anonymous. And Mrs Baxter says she's pretty sure she gives the same amounts to several of the other children's hospitals, too."

"Well, I am surprised. You could knock me down with a locomotive. What's that you say?—can't hear?—I said locomotive—lo-co-mo-tive. No—it's not a good word for the telephone. No."

"I suppose it's because she has none of her own."

"Yes, I suppose so. But what a good thing there was no snowstorm. I quite intended to do something on my own. Still if she will be so private about her charities she can hardly blame us for thinking her selfish. Yes—you are right. Her privacy works out very well there. It is the very essence of charity to give and say nothing. What's that you say?—it must be the teeth? Yes, quite so. Yes, I always thought there was something very promising about those teeth, myself——"

MRS PITKEATHLY

"SNOW everywhere, as far as eye could reach."

So wrote Bret Harte in describing a winter scene, and with those few words sets it before us.

January had come round and found us with others of our kind installed in the big new hotel at Lauter-simmen. It was and it wasn't new; that is, it had been added to and bits partly pulled down; and refaced or relined or reconstructed by the addition of large pieces and wings in place of smaller bits subtracted. It had faced one way to begin with and they had, by blocking up the old windows, and breaking out new ones, slewed its face round and put it to gaze at the Munsterhorn on the south-west instead of the Essen-berg on the north-east, so that by no longer looking at the sunrise rosy on the peaks it had the benefit of the valley weltering in the glowing sunsets.

We had been coming out for years and every year noticed some fresh feature in this surprising hotel. A new restaurant in addition to the old table d'hôte, in which ladies now appeared in Aix-les-Bains hats at forty guineas, with aigrettes and fifty-thousand-pound pearl necklaces, and Rue de la Paix gowns, in place of the simple frocks of yore. Finally this season of which I write there had been such an outbreak of palm courts and dancing halls and new bathrooms and suites for Russian princes that we did not know whether we were entitled to give ourselves airs and ask for special terms as its first patrons or the oldest inhabitants. One of our fellow-guests whom I shall describe to you more fully in time, got sweeping reductions on both counts.

The slewing round of the façade was a good deed and

the hotel, situated on a plateau at some tremendous altitude, and yet sheltered as in a bowl on three sides from cold mountain blasts by towering white giants, stared valiantly adown the valley. To give an idea of the impressions of the outlook from it we might as it were lift the lid of the brain of a newly arrived visitor fresh to these snowy glories, having never yet witnessed the spectacle of the winter enthroned on these high places of the Earth, with her diadem of icicles, and King Frost in attendance upon her, as her gentleman-in-waiting, sitting at her feet. Reaching there perhaps at night, tired and sleepy from his sleigh drive through the cold air, he tumbles into his bed and sleeps. Waking in the morning he tumbles out of his bed, slips into a dressing-gown, throws his balcony window open and steps out to look around. He sees a world that seems to him white as a dream of far-off Polar snows. In a gasp of admiration and surprise he draws in his breath, deep, and the crisp freshness of the air takes him almost aback, for it is cold, wondrous cold.

Across the ravine he flings his glance, and gasping again, his eyes cling giddily to the pinnacles beyond, that tear upward to the sky. His head swims for a moment, and then steadies. He takes a long, long look, and then comes in again and rings for coffee to pull himself together.

The hotel is a world of its own, holding intercourse of sorts with certain other similar worlds scattered about in other adjacent Alpine hollows or rifts in the system of mountain peaks. And each one hummed and buzzed with a varied multitude and varied excitements. This year I had noticed with satisfaction a thicker sprinkling of pretty girls than usual, sitting about the exceedingly new and exceedingly decorative palm court after lunch. No one who has not spent a season in such a resort can imagine how delectable and altogether irresistible they can look in their skating kits and club sweaters and caps, or other cunning and

knowing little headgear they adopt, velvet berets or bonnets of wool with their club insignia worked in contrasting colours, black on cherry-red, or tango-orange on something equally brilliant; daringly short skirts, and high boots or leggings clasping trim slim ankles, completing a costume in which they looked both fettish and featly. I can only say that a susceptible bachelor had better look out for himself as it is a dangerous place for anyone who has an unoccupied spot in his heart. He must be on his guard there against the possessors of healthily dazzling eyes and rosy cheeks and lithe figures become utterly graceful with the continuous exercise, for the fine air combined with wholesome bodily exertion makes a plain woman good-looking and turns a good-looking woman into a perfect Diana.

One saw here too, picked men—splendid men, with muscles hardened and yet made supple, skins tanned, brains cleared by the strenuous games they play all day. Their conversation all turns on the speed of the last bob race or the result of a curling match or So-and-so's form in the figure skating competition and all the other clean futility to which, thank goodness, English men devote so much of their time.

The general mass was sprinkled with the usual number of ruthless pot-hunters, determined at all costs to grasp at any little oversight or slip on the part of an adversary in a game or lodge an objection on a hair's-breadth of an infringement of a rule, the decision of which might be an open question, and by a fraction turn the contest in their favour at the end. The sort of people to avoid, in short.

And speaking of people to avoid, there were those one had avoided quite painstakingly, such as the family of the Smythes, who had come out for many seasons past, just as we did and with whom we had never mixed. Our lot and their lot having felt a sort of mutual antagonism, stared at one another disapprovingly on the stairs, making captious remarks of one another as

to dress and demeanour, meeting and never getting to know one another.

This year, through a series of small incidents, we discovered that one of their number was charming and through her that all the others were charming too, and they must have observed something of the sort about us, for as if by magic we mingled as utterly and completely as before we had remained apart. We made friends and laughed together, ate together and danced and practised combined figure skating together all the season, and regretted the good days we had wasted by not getting friendly sooner. They told us that we were so smart and good-looking that they felt sure we must be stand-offish and so didn't dare to make any overtures to us and we said we had felt the very same about them.

And so now we sat together and watched the fresh arrivals as they came, each making a little eddy of excitement and interest in the hotel. And together we would sit and survey them languidly and quiz them among ourselves and decide which we would like to know and which not. Some we pronounced possible, others impossible, and we hob-nobbed there a gravely pronounced judgment, jumping to wrong conclusions about them just as we'd jumped to them about each other before, forgetting that it is difficult to pass accurate judgments on new arrivals to a great pleasure resort; for as often as not they are not themselves but transitorily someone else, and that not anyone they have ever been before, nor anyone that they will remain long. John Browne comes out alone, but he is not the John Browne who kissed Mrs B. at the station and the little B.'s, bidding them be good and not spend too much money in his absence. The real John Browne never gets any farther than Charing Cross, and is by nature rather a grouchy sort of chap of whom his family are rather afraid, with a peck of business cares on his shoulders and his pocket full of income-tax papers and applications for rent, rates and taxes.

The John Browne who arrives at Lautersimmen is on pleasure bent. He tore the bills up and let them flutter out of the carriage window on his way there. Things that would have caused him to grouse before bring a smile to his face. He's polite away when he'd be uncivil in his own country. He's a human being away. He's often quite horrid at home. So he is not himself in any sense of the word. And the little girl that he helps out of the station bus and for whom he bought chocolates so generously is not herself either. She is a very suppressed person at home and she has escaped from there with some money earned somehow and she is free to laugh and talk and speak her mind, and her real sat-upon self is probably at Charing Cross cloak-room also waiting to be called for on the way back.

If the arrivals were entirely new and unacquainted with the life and ways of the place, they certainly did bring the wrong clothes and the wrong ideas and said and did the wrong thing till half-way through their time there. And at first they would value things differently to the values put on them by those who knew the ropes. For instance they might think that gorgeous clothes and gorgeous jewels and retinues of servants counted there. But they would find that the grocer's son who was out there for his health and had carried off most of the prizes and cups in the different competitions was a person before whom titled people quailed, difficult of approach and around whom hung an aura of awful majesty, only to be dispelled if he so wished it. A nod from him was a gift to be cherished with gratitude. A smile given casually warmed one up like a hot-water bottle.

The poor newly come greenhorns, as defenceless as shorn lambs, though they wotted not of it, would plunge bodily into a vortex of complicated cross-currents and tides of intercourse and crash through unwritten laws and smash eggs which ought not to have been trodden on. Sailing on to the rink, all wobbly at the knees and ankles through not knowing how to skate properly and

boldly annexing that portion of it which by all the aforesaid unwritten laws of that community was the jealously guarded pitch of the world champion, they'd keep him out of it for hours whilst the habitués looked on aghast and tried to distract his attention from the full horror of the situation with forced conversation and jokes and offers (refused) of cigars or cigarettes. The wife of the wobbly new-comer, more wobbly still, bumps with many a feeble giggle into the almost equally august consort of the world champion, who likely as not, for that is how she spends her days, is revolving passionately round an orange as though nothing else in the whole world could possibly matter. Nor could it to her! And then pitifully oblivious of the fact that every moment of the day is of importance to her if she is to maintain the position so nearly wrested from her last year by the other lady champion, Mrs Wobbly Newcomer will stand and apologise at length and babble about the weather and her first impressions of the place or give particulars about a convalescent child at home, who has just had the mumps; never guessing that to the celebrity children are anathema, as likely to interfere with skating, and that though she is fuming to begin again, she yet does not like to dismiss the speaker.

The thought of blunders such as these brings the beads of cold sweat to their brows in after years. But they were not so bad as the dinner-parties they gave and to which they invited the hereditary arch-enemies and leaders of rival factions, putting them to sit side by side at the same festive board. And quite unconscious of the numerous cliques and cabals which undermine the society there they were surprised because things had not gone well and there had been some slight unpleasantness. Afterwards, having been told what they had done, they shuddered, and sometimes had not the pluck to ever come out again.

We had this year in addition to the pretty girls I've mentioned, the usual number of well-developed eccen-

trics. Not taking into account our old friend Johnson who was suffering from hallucinations and had got it into his head that the world was about to shift its moorings owing to some hitch which he declared had occurred in the sun's powers of attraction. He was very nervous and in a state of restlessness. He was on my corridor and his malady affected him more at night than in the day-time. In the early hours he would come out of his bedroom and knock us all up, because, as he said with his teeth chattering, we were going shortly to plunge into space and it would be a pity to miss the fun. There was nothing dangerous about the poor creature. He was some relation of the Doctor's and was under his care there, as his bodily health necessitated high altitudes. So we humoured him and saved his face when we could. But I'd had him on my floor last year, so I considered I'd had my share of him for some time. Owing to my double rôle of oldest inhabitant and earliest arrival I had access to the ear of the management, so I had him moved down to Mrs Pitkeathly's floor. I am, I suppose, selfish.

Apart from this affair, and the affair of Mrs Pitkeathly, the most notable event to my way of thinking was the stemming of the coming of the Germanic tribes; at any rate of a portion of them. Shapeless creatures who committed in their garb and bearing every crime against good taste possible. Evidently the news had percolated to the farthest confines of their country that there were gay doings in winter-time in the Bernese Oberland, and in addition to swarming like locusts on the Riviera later in the year and drinking their countless bocks in frowsy meditation by the shores of the Mediterranean they began a descent upon, or rather an ascent of, the Swiss mountain resorts. It was quite an innovation as far as Lautersimmen was concerned, and we resented it very properly and determined to keep them out of our hotel whatever sort of a flat-footing they might get in the others; we also sent over to these, emissaries and envoys-extraordinary, to

persuade them to pass the hard word and to put all obstacles possible in the way of the onrush. Unfortunately our manager was away burying an aunt in another canton and we were obliged to put up with their presence for some little time, though we knew that they would get short shrift on his return. Our luck was out for the time being as the only table that fell vacant was near ours and so we had to sit for three whole days and listen to them eating. There were five in the family which effected this temporary lodgment under our roof, father, mother and three girls. Father was monstrous fat and the texture of his tissue was not tough enough, but quivered dangerously and appeared about to slip. I thought he would have been better and less precariously contained in a bottle or glass vessel than in a suit of clothes, and prayed no one would collide with him and spill him, for then he would have to be mopped up. They all in turn ordered out-of-the-way dishes and when they arrived found fault with them loudly and vociferously, and notwithstanding that they ate them. They exchanged pieces, discussed them, admired them, exhibited them, handed one another tit-bits and splashed gravy and smacked their lips instead of eating quietly as we English do, and as if we were ashamed of doing so, and should get it over as noiselessly and expeditiously as possible.

They gurgled and gobbled, and it was a perfect orchestration of table sounds. Dan, who was, by special appointment, musician in ordinary to the party, and who composed epithalamiums for our birthday festivals, and wedding marches for such of Celia's friends as took the matrimonial header wove it into a Fantasia-Impromptu. He divided it into portions to represent the progress of the dinner. Hors d'œuvres. *Con anima, vivo e risoluto.* Soup. *Molto con fuoco, sempre piu* and *da capo.* Fish. *Presto con fuoco, piu agitato e stretto* and *da capo.* Joint. *Molto con fuoco, accelerando appassionata, sempre piu* and *da capo.* Sweet. *Andante sostenuto, a piacere* and *da capo.*

Dessert. *Diminuendo, meno mosso, e poco a poco ritornare al tempo primo.*

It began gaily and went rapidly on and seemed about to end gaily, for it gradually returned to the first *tempo*, but changed swiftly and lapsed into a finale of diminished sevenths with dirge-like chords resembling muffled drums, blending exquisitely with the wailing of the womenkind when the fat man died of overeating. Dan turned round and sat on the piano in the movement representing the fall preceding the death struggle. It was a clever representation of the music of a nation which is so unlike that of the French : the latter seems chiefly to busy itself with light amourettes, easily begun, carried off gracefully, and melodiously forgotten, in contradistinction to music which represents the heavy morbid love-longing of some fat professor who eats too much and wears a tall hat and tan boots on Sundays, and imitation collars and cuffs on weekdays, for a fat schoolmistress with a fifty-inch waist and suicidal tendencies which are destined to consummation, because she cannot bring herself to believe that she is worthy of the fat professor's love.

Father, mother and the girls approved of us and sent a callow waiter—not our own, he'd have known better —with a message to us from them saying they thought it would give them much pleasure to make our acquaintance and would we also assist them in making themselves known to some of the other nice people in the hotel. I, for our party, replied, in a carefully worded missive, carefully and clearly translated by the faithful François, our own tried and trusted waiter, that we already had as many friends as we cared to have and that we would esteem it a favour if they would get themselves fitted with silencers as the noises they made at table had filled us with dismay.

They dined sombrely one more night and next evening we knew them no more.

But as I said, this affair was only a small incident. The main incident was the Pitkeathly incident. Mrs

MRS PITKEATHLY

Pitkeathly is a sister of Mrs Babbington Hooper and is therefore distantly connected with Celia. She is fatter than her sister, who is only about sixteen stone—I'll tell you something about that later—and is even more unpopular. She comes every year to our hotel, and I've often enough suggested that, consequent on this, we should pitch our camp elsewhere, but Celia's reply is that we are very comfortable where we are and that she would probably follow us, for there is a certain social kudos to be got from Celia's brilliant friendship ; in addition to which she can watch her and talk about her afterwards and put false constructions on her doings more successfully ; and impute wrong motives to her, and give little intimate snacks of information about her and gossip to people who don't know her but would like to, better than if they were both putting up at different places. Celia's real feeling in the matter, I am sure, is that by staying in the same hotel with her she knows she can keep an eye on her, and that she can then step in and undo some of the harm and mischief that Mrs Pitkeathly does before it is too late, and nip some of her horrid machinations in the bud.

To a person of Mrs Pitkeathly's inclination, and I'll even go so far as to say talents, one of those winter resorts' hotels affords endless scope for her energies. Morals in many ways are at a low ebb in them. Here, where we were, it was no better than anywhere else. There was a perceptible confusion as to the terms *meum* and *tuum* ; a very distinct inclination to be foggy about the sacred rights of property, a mixing-up as to the ownership of things, whether it was a wife, a husband, a fiancé or fiancée, or whether it was merely a smaller piece of personal property such as a sweater or a book, an alpenstock or ruck-sac or a camera or a handful of useful leather boot-laces. Everybody bagged everything and everybody denied having bagged anything, so prevarication was on the list of misdemeanours too. In the morning there was a wild scramble and whoever was down first took everything there was to take and

got off into the wild snowy wastes with their plunder before the rightful owner got down. I've seen my own luge with my name branded on it with a hot iron being used by someone I'd never even seen in my life before —perhaps for that very reason—and when taxed, the pretty thief (it was a girl)—declared shamelessly that it was hers and even when I pointed to my name and produced my card to verify it, she defied me and told me I was big enough to go and bag one for myself, instead of chiveying a poor defenceless woman so early in the morning. And in two shakes of a lamb's tail she was off and away, leaving me with a bit of cherry-coloured wool off her sweater in my hand and I staring after her, as she whizzed down the valley.

Even women with beautiful candid middle-aged faces lost all sense of right and wrong when they got there. Passing through the hall with an after-breakfast pipe between my teeth I saw two older ladies whose position and morals I knew to be impeccable at home—patronesses of infirmary balls, openers of bazaars and subscribers to Y.W.C.A.'s and leaders of high tone in the Midland counties—haggling like fishwives over the ownership of a pair of dilapidated gouties, otherwise known as snow-boots. Their language was dreadful as they pulled fiercely at the unfortunate waterproof articles, this way and that. I stepped in, removing my pipe, and insisted upon arbitrating and, after the manner of Solomon and the baby, awarded the pair to the woman who seemed most anxious that they should not get torn to bits. The other woman hated me ever afterwards, and I'm afraid they belonged to her. But in the face of such a clear legal precedent, what could I do ?

Therefore I feel sure that all this sort of thing attracted Mrs Pitkeathly to Switzerland, on account of the opportunities it gave her to note such happenings and to bewail the lowering of the moral tone among the women of to-day compared with those of her young days. She is so fat that she couldn't possibly take part in the sports, so that can't be her reason for patronising such a place,

unless it may be some comfort to her to know that in comparison with the Alps she looked quite a reasonable size, almost diminutive indeed, and some inward craving towards æsthetic balance may have irresistibly drawn her thither.

But as Celia says, when you've already found an excellent and obvious explanation for a thing, why cast about for something abstruse and beside the case as I do. Undoubtedly she came there to indulge her taste for scandalmongering and mischief-making. For even if she were not too fat to skate and luge and so on, she professes to view the easy mingling of the sexes which such pursuits engender with disapproval. Her little cunning elephant's eyes are always darting this way and that, intent on seeing what she should not see, and even when it is not there seeing it all the same. There are more ways than one of enjoying oneself, and gloating over the fact of other people's misdemeanours when you haven't the pluck or the chance of embarking on anything like them yourself is one way of doing so. She was of those who derive a more sustained and whole-souled joy from the misdeeds of others than the wretched criminals themselves in the doing of them. They were hampered by remorse and dread of discovery and a hundred fears beset them. Mrs Pitkeathly took her time, ate and slept well, and had a clear (?) conscience in the matter and got far, far more fun out of it than they did. She watched everything narrowly and repeated everything wherever it was likely to do most damage.

The display of pretty figures and shapely limbs on the rinks called down her disapproval. She would boom out her diatribes "When I was a young girl it would have been considered the height of bad form to throw yourself about in a short skirt like that. Humph! the idea! The late Mr Pitkeathly's mother would never have selected me as a suitable wife for her dear son if I had done that!!! She chose me for my modesty and decorum. She knew I would never have behaved like that!!!"

This account of her marriage with the late Mr Pitkeathly did not tally with Celia's. She very unkindly said that Mrs P. (then Miss Somebody-or-other) locked herself up in a room with him and swallowed the key so that he should not be able to get out till she had frightened him into proposing.

She heaved aggressively at the sight of a pair of natty ankles tripping by. "Look at that woman! Do you think I'd ever dream of exposing my limbs to that extent? ! !"

I said, "I don't suppose you would for *one moment*," inwardly reminding myself of a story I had heard from the Doctor as quite a true one about her.

It so transpired (he narrated) that during one of her earlier visits, spurred out of her customary lethargy by the sight of some elderly and plump matrons curveting on the ice, she had made a tremendous effort in very long skirts to achieve the drop three. She fell and hurt herself and a dozen men or so bore her tenderly to her room, and the injured limb, of which the ankle turned out to be sprained, was carefully treated, and as the case progressed and the pain lessened, in due course, it was massaged to reduce the swelling. But the injury was obstinate and the swelling was colossal and refused to go down, and the Doctor was puzzled. By all reasonable calculations dated from the moment of the fall and the amount of lesion allowed for she ought to have been decidedly on the mend. He began to think his treatment had been on the wrong lines, so he took other and more drastic measures, prescribing stronger massage and much stronger lotions, to prevent a continuation of the inflammation. And yet that swelling remained to worry him. He ran his fingers through his hair. He felt all his training, his experiments with muscles under different conditions of abrasion and contusion or strain must have been incomplete. Gently, so as not to alarm his patient more than was necessary, he told her he must have a consultation with the best men to be got from Lausanne

and Geneva, for his own medical knowledge was at fault and he now felt there was some deep-seated injury which he was powerless to locate. After hearing his verdict, Mrs Pitkeathly burst into tears, and setting modesty aside for once, projected the other ankle from its discreet envelopments.

The sound ankle was exactly the same size as the swollen ankle.

So Mrs Pitkeathly did not take any skating exercise, but what she lost in that way she made up for in the exercise she took in digging pitfalls for the unwary. The doctors loathed her. Williams garnished his little story to me about her with several remarks and adjectives I have thought fit to suppress. She caused endless fracas among the patients, poor crotchety invalids, most of them already only too prone to see the black side of things and ready to fall under the influence of her mischievous tongue. The very presence and nature of their ailment made them peevish and on the look-out for slights. She would instil into the mind of one that the doctor did not visit her enough to get a thorough understanding of her needs, nor stay long enough; and drop in a counter-suggestion, which she kindly left there to simmer, that too much time which was hers by rights, and according to payments exacted, was spent at the bed-side or chair-side of another lady patient. Always under the guise of the most perfect friendliness she used to come and see them. One big man, who was very seriously ill indeed, and quite far gone, went back so much in his condition that her visits had to be stopped. She had contrived in some way to make him feel that he had no right to "give in." Now they both of them came from the Northern Midlands where illness is not looked upon as a sign of bodily weakness, but of mental weakness, and where to be bed-ridden or in pain is to deserve and expect no sympathy, so she knew what material she had to work on, and as it was already as much as the doctors and his wife could do to get him to take the smallest care of himself at all, you can imagine

the havoc she wrought. There was a great explosion, a combined effort of one wife and four doctors, and Mrs Pitkeathly was shown the door, and within a reasonable time the man recovered.

It is bad art, I'm told, on the part of an author to describe his characters. They should reveal themselves by their actions as the story progresses. But in Mrs Pitkeathly's case this would not occur. Her actions if recorded as they appeared superficially would show her to be a blameless, praiseworthy woman. We who knew her, knew her to be a horrid old hypocrite with an uncurbed appetite for making mischief. True, she was very seldom heard to say or repeat anything nasty about anybody. Oh dear, no! Her methods were more subtle than that. They were compact of innuendoes and hinted suggestions. She worked it all in such a way that the casual and unsuspecting observer would think she was bent upon making things pleasant for everyone by repeating all the nice things said of any one person by another. But we who knew her, as I say, were not deceived. We knew she only admitted a virtue or a charm in a person if there were someone present whom it was calculated to depress or annoy or by an implied comparison inflict a pang. (If a virtue or a charm or a talent could not be used as a stick with which to beat someone, it went unrecognised by Mrs Pitkeathly.) It was "the cap does not fit YOU; don't you attempt to wear it." It was a delicate and ingenious, invidious and odious system of comparison.

Let us say a large circle was assembled round her—she had a way of summoning any aimlessly wandering guests who had not as yet been drawn into any circles to near-by vacant chairs with a wave of a formidable tortoise-shell needle. She knitted, I need hardly say, woollen discomforts for the poor of her parish. Thus she was usually the centre of a group of new-comers, who as yet did not know what she was really like. Having once, as I say, got them about her, she'd begin by relating the charming things old Sir Stephen Davies had said

to her about his ELDER daughter. To the persons not directly concerned it would appear to be nice of her to be pleased at the old father's love and appreciation of his child, and nice in her too to retail it for the approval of the assembly. Afterwards they would remark that they could NOT understand why people said Mrs Pitkeathly said horrid things. For their part they never heard her repeat anything that was not perfectly kind and nice. But then they probably had not noticed that she had first satisfied herself out of the corner of her eye that his second daughter—not so pretty, nor so bright, and consequently not so popular—was listening, nor would they perceive that she had repeated the words in just such a way and with just such a tone and inflection that to her it would appear that Sir Stephen loved his elder daughter so whole-heartedly and utterly that there couldn't possibly be any love left over for anyone else—not even for another daughter—which was the very last construction the dear old greybeard would wish put on his chance words. The Davies girl would feel the remarks doubly hearing them before others, not realising in her confusion of mind that probably none of the people assembled knew who she was. But Mrs Pitkeathly had of course called them together so that it would make it feel much worse for her, and guessed this would escape her notice. And so passing over the heads of most it would lodge, and rankle in poor little Miss Davies' breast and raise hitherto unknown doubts as to her old father's affection for her.

Probably earlier in the day if she had time, and, industrious woman that she was, she'd generally manage to find time, she had taken Miss Davies aside and in sepulchral tones asked her if she thought that her father's affection for her was as great as that he felt for her sister; by her manner clearly showing that SHE did not think so, in fact that it was only too obvious that he didn't. That it is a great shame. That she pities her from the bottom of her heart.

And so on, and so on, all along the line, she sowed

mistrust. Mistrust between fathers and daughters, husbands and wives, mistrust between youths and maidens, mischief and misunderstandings and muddle between old-time friends. Even the best-balanced people who were too healthy, too prosperous and too pleasantly occupied to seriously dislike any of their fellow-men would sometimes get caught in her net. I've seen them struggling in it, angry and amazed and unable to understand their own feelings or discover what had happened to them, while she wound them tighter and tighter, dropping suspicions into perfectly clear minds, leaving them to infect healthy ideas and rankle and breed, so that perhaps they might never get clear of them again.

Whatever anyone did and prided themselves on doing well, or on being, or on thinking, she managed in a most Machiavellian way to keep up a running fire of criticism or comparison of them in relation to this point, by reference to what people said of them or it or of what she'd heard they'd said or heard they'd heard other people had said. Or things which if not actually said were known to be thought, or said to be thought, or things which were thought to be thought. Anything, in short, which happened to be in favour of anyone anybody happened to be up against, in any way ; and in a place such as Lautersimmen, with every conceivable form of winter sport going on, and sporting entries in progress all the time and competitions of every sort and kind coming off daily there were absolutely endless chances of stirring up bad blood in this way. You were never allowed for one moment to forget that you and some other person or persons were after the same thing. You were never allowed to get it out of your mind that there was this other (or these others) outdistancing you—doing so much better than you—outpacing you, making you feel small in some way, and that your want of progress was being watched and commented on by a lot of people.

Her methods were pressing, insistent, provocative,

aggravating and yet she never once seemed to address you during the entire proceedings, but only those people who were in your vicinity. If asked you could not have truthfully said that she had been running you down in any way. She had merely been cracking up the other or others, who were up against you, to your, or her, friends.

She had great success with the younger and more sensitive girls. She'd extol the beauty of this one or that one by the hour, but never to her face. No, that would have given that person pleasure. Instead, with an assumption of clumsy affability which took in a surprising number of people, she would corner someone, such as poor little Daisy George, who was as nice as she was plain, and as plain as she was nice, and as self-deprecating as she could be, and talk to her about the great success some of the more (apparently) attractive girls had, so that each remark fell like a sledge-hammer on poor little Daisy's sensitive nature, showing her the gap, the enormous gap which lay between her and these favoured others, and proving to her beyond a doubt that she must quench the little spark of hope that some day—someone—might possibly—one never knew—take a fancy to her and propose.

Had she noticed how fine Mary's skin was ? (Daisy knew hers was thick and this made it feel thicker by comparison.) Daphne's hair was so light and fluffy and pretty. (Daisy's was lank and now felt lanker.) Elaine was so much admired, she was so tall and graceful. (Daisy was wide and short and knew it.) Bee was so beautifully dressed. (Daisy had only ugly shabby things.) Cynthia was a vision. (Daisy saw now that she was a nightmare.)

But Celia and I rescued her just in time and managed to give her back some of her self-esteem and confidence, which were ebbing from her so fast that soon she would have been bankrupt of the two things without which it is almost impossible to go on living.

Fortunately circumstances did not always work out for the tormentor. Many a victim bucked up through sheer despair and made supreme efforts to prove her wrong. For instance Clara Downes was so tired of constantly hearing how wonderfully Polly Grover skated, that she made positively superhuman efforts and wrested the Schiedegg ladies' silver shield from her and thanked Mrs Pitkeathly by falling on her bosom and saying it was all due to her.

How she infuriated me at times! The subtlety of her. Nothing escaped her, no phase of character but was wrung and exploited by her, through some miraculous and sinister knowledge of human nature which was hers. Though you had never told her a certain man embodied everything you most disapproved of—though you had never even mentioned his name to her—though you had never sufficiently come in contact with him to betray it to anyone—she had a deadly and unerring instinct that he was the type by which you would be absolutely antagonised. She KNEW!! And from that moment she'd begin and whip up and whip up and by gradual degrees and cynical steps raise the ire and dislike of him which hitherto had slept coldly and more or less unsuspected in your bosom. She would praise him a little, and then some more, and at last praise him till she nauseated you and by her loud and exaggerated admiration cause you to cast your mind in his direction, when perforce you noticed his shortcomings on the points she extolled. Then she harried you by saying sweet things he didn't deserve, and attributing virtues to him the which you knew he lacked, gradually leading you and then forcing you—yes, forcing you—to deny them, and to say things against him, to prove that you were right in denying them, and of course before a whole roomful of people. Then how she would turn on you and rend you and hold you up to scorn for your meanness and uncharitableness. She lashed you and goaded you with her tongue for nursing such cankered rotten thoughts

in your bosom, and running down your harmless worthy brother man. She held you up to scorn, calling on those about you to witness the depths of selfishness you had in your nature. You'd look round blankly at all the faces there—for of course she never took the trouble to do this unless she had a big audience ready—and you'd read in them all an utter horror of your unworthiness.

She presented you with a coffin free of charge in which to lay your self-respect and contrived so diabolically to put you at the disadvantage that every word you uttered was a nail in it.

She dazed you. She bewildered you. And if you showed any signs of coming to your senses, she got up and walked away!

After this had happened a few times I was almost convinced I had no right to live, but I sat down quietly and analysed the matter and as in a flash I tumbled to her snakish pastime.

She accused you, Old Baileyed you, and gave you no chance of defending yourself.

But once I saw what her methods were I warded her attacks off. After that we became good friends —in a manner of speaking. But it was quite some time before I tumbled to it, and simple soul that I am I'd fall into her snare, and flattered at being asked by such a very fat and formidable woman (we are often impressed by fat, if it's stern fat) what I thought of things, I'd let myself be drawn out, and reveal the further hideous depths in my soul. She did not employ an audience for this. She used confederates, of which she had two or three generally in attendance and who formed the nucleus of the audience when needed. They would install themselves and sit waiting and watching and every time you revealed your thoughts their eyes would meet meaningly.

"What do you think of Mrs Such-and-such-a-one, Mr Blenerhassett?"

I would reply.

Click (eyes meeting).

"Ah—is THAT so? That's very interesting. I've often wanted to ask you. And now, DO tell me your opinion about——?"

It might be anything, people, politics, literature, marriage—but preferably something the reply to which one's answer could be misconstrued or misliked, or misread.

I would reply fairly fully perhaps.

Click.

"Ah-h. Really. But SURELY you can't mean that you think——?" repeating what I've just said.

I go over it again, making my meaning a little clearer.

Click.

This time I'd feel uncomfortable and I'd gather it meant that my words, spoken casually and in confidence, as among friends, had produced a very unfavourable impression. More, that they had finally and definitely made it clear that my ideas on things were not wholesome, not what they ought to be. That my interrogators feared this was the case and that now they could no longer give me even the benefit of the doubt. I'd feel, as I say, uncomfortable, and turn what I'd said over in my mind to see what there was that was so awful and that should cause my hearers' eyes to click so lugubriously and oddly. It is the teeshiest, weeshiest little bit of a click. You may not hear it at first, especially if you have perhaps by accident left any little sud of soap about your ears in shaving in a hurry.

But by degrees when you have been roped in by these old harpies a few times and drawn out in the same way, you'll begin to see what they are at. You will know

that you will probably hear it and you'll listen for it, and there sure enough it will be like the tiny clash of some nasty tinkling teeny cymbal.

Click.

But after a time I enjoyed it, and I knew that whatever I said their unpleasantly constructed minds would find something to reproach me with. Then of course I gave them plenty to click about, talking any amount of lurid talk, and they wallowed in it and clicked so loudly that anyone could have heard them at any distance.

I added a small rider to my grace after meals, giving thanks that people of that sort did disapprove of me. Approval from them would have been an insult.

The hotel was large and prey was always plentiful. I followed her, on the watch, nursing my thoughts. If she discovered a certain person had any special knowledge or had made up a subject to the extent of constituting himself an authority upon it, and she found out that he innocently prided himself on the fact, she had a rare dodge for setting him down over it. This was capital fun.

The audience was got together, biggish if possible, and selected from those who knew the certain person knew a good deal about a certain subject or at any rate that he considered himself to be in the way of knowing a great deal. Then in her non-committal way, she would start the topic, venturing theories, airing surmises, and when her chosen victim, gently pleased at being able to descant upon his hobby, prepared to weigh in with his specific information, probably well worth hearing, she would brush it aside contemptuously as if he were not there, deliberately talking right over his head or across the end of his nose, calling on and encouraging someone else who, as she was aware, knew practically nothing about it, and who talked at random, only too glad to air his views and assume a knowledge to which he hadn't the ghost of a right; nodding her

head at him, making complimentary ejaculations and asking the others to agree with her as to what a very clever, interesting fellow he was, telling him that she set store by his words and would lay them carefully to heart; silencing and disregarding the unfortunate expert whenever he tried to speak, and driving him nearly wild. For when, frenzied by the nonsense talked by the ignorant fellow, he broke in agitatedly, she would fix her gaze on him magisterially and with high disapproval convey to him with a look the fact that she thought that he was making himself quite absurd and conspicuous and that a display of a little more agitation on his part would prove that he was altogether undesirable as an acquaintance if not actually mentally unfit! That to interrupt someone who REALLY knew something of this matter of which she particularly wanted details, was bad taste, and still worse, that to thrust himself forward and possibly prevent her obtaining this information for which her soul thirsted, was TOO MUCH!

The cleverer and more well informed the victim the more she scored. Because of course being clever he'd be highly strung, and being clever would not understand her. Clever people very seldom notice what stupid people are at. They understand clever people, but they can't make out stupid ones. Possibly because some instinct tells them they are not worth noticing and they don't study them because there is nothing useful to be learnt from them. This very often puts clever people at the mercy of stupid ones. But not for long. When they finally decide to give their attention to them they can generally make it hot for them.

This game of hers was an old one, and in some parts of the country is called " playing people off against one another," and some people think it very amusing.

Truly all good impulses were perverted in Mrs Pitkeathly. If she gave a present it was not for the joy of being generous to a fellow-creature but to let someone else know they had been forgotten. She had a way of

distributing small and valueless gifts at Christmas time or upon her departure, but she took care that the distribution should take place in such a way that some people would feel they had been left out in the cold. Of course she got great credit from those who did not know her, for her good-heartedness and open-handedness, because, as they remarked, she was "far from being well off." When anyone talked in this way and expatiated on her generosity it literally drove me wild. I ground my teeth, for apart from the misbegotten motives that I knew governed the bestowal of her gifts, I knew that if ever a woman gloried and luxuriated in her comparative poverty and extracted pleasure from the fact of being poor, that woman was Mrs Pitkeathly. If Providence would only give her sort of character to such people as he condemns to exist on inadequate incomes there would be far less unhappiness in the world, and poverty would become an enviable state. Why, she indisputably revelled in underpaying tradespeople and haggling with them! Getting them to give her things for half nothing and then leaving the bills unpaid for ages. She found it an excuse to underpay and underfeed her servants (I believe she mesmerised them into staying with her till such time as their knees and healths gave way). She would not have cared to make things pleasant for others by scattering largess, and her income luckily for her made this more or less impossible. She had no generous impulses and wallowed in never doing a decent thing, whilst I and other friends whose incomes were small suffered tortures and groaned in anguish at not being able to gratify ours in those directions. No. Poverty was to her a luxury which no money could have bought. She preferred to wear horrid clothes, and even if she could have had lovely ones they would not have appealed to her; her life was one long delectable battle with all those from whom she purchased or hired or with whom she marketed or exchanged, and her want of means was one long excuse for the practising of meannesses of all sorts which were

really not necessary. The hotel bureau knew her almost daily asking for reductions or railing against overcharges.

What with one thing and what with another there was no denying but that Mrs Pitkeathly was wasted as a woman. I thought of all the nasty jobs there are in the world which perforce have to be undertaken by some man often against his inclination or better nature. Such as the job of the public hangman or the man who drives the Black Maria or the warder who turns the key in the lock of the palsied felon's cell.

Here was someone who would have enjoyed such work and by a mere accident of birth was debarred from doing so. Just because she was a woman these privileges could never be hers. And with reference to this accident of birth I shall have more to say soon.

This particular season she had got a larger bag than usual. The hotel, to mix my metaphors, was strewn with wreckage. She had broken off several promising love affairs between suitable parties, which had been likely to develop into engagements, by a few well-timed ill-chosen words. The Harriman divorce case was pending and, we suspected, could very likely—in fact very, very likely—be traced to her. And goodness knows how many before this, in addition to the very well-known one of last season, by which reckless, exquisite little Allie Acheson became a social outcast. There were many such things which we felt ought to be laid at her door but of which we could get no actual outward traces.

The management was well aware of her doings, and we had held consultations; and Celia had broached the subject of their refusing her rooms. Poor Bischoffsheim shrugged his shoulders and said they had many times thought of it but that there were two sides to the question. Unfortunately for them Mrs Pitkeathly was very well connected; her relations held some of the highest places, not only in England but in many of the Courts of Europe. To affront her would be to affront

the great family of which she was an unworthy representative, and it might have the most far-reaching results; for though personally they might not like her or approve of her they might quite possibly back her up in such a matter, and the management might find themselves up against the whole family; so dare not do it.

It was a bore to think that these high relations of hers should stand in the way of justice being meted out to her, though it was in a way thanks to them that I used to manage to get a little of my own and other people's back. It meant that I had to spend a certain amount of time with her, but this fitted in well with a plan we had in mind, Celia and I, and so it was by no means wasted. I had hurt my foot, too, rather badly in a skiing competition and I used to drop into a long chair beside her, where she sat with all the grace of a traction engine in repose, knitting, and lay my sticks down between us on the sunny verandah overlooking the bandy, and the curling rinks; listening to the wild yells and Scotch hoots and ructions that arose from the latter, and reached us only slightly muffled by the soft soundless snow, sloping down to us on all sides.

"*Soop* it up, *soop* it up," came the cry, to be succeeded by the noise of frantic sweepings. Why curling should be accompanied by a perfect pandemonium of sound is beyond my comprehension. It is a custom which might well be more honoured in the breach than the observance, but I suppose will die hard like many a worse one.

Sitting there like that I came in, of necessity, for a good deal of good advice from Mrs Pitkeathly. She was never one to shirk a duty if it were likely to annoy anyone. And nothing, as she knew, could be more likely to annoy a man than to keep on plying him with good advice. It's tantamount to telling him that you know he is not doing well. It is tantamount certainly to letting him know that there is at any rate one person on whom the fact is not lost. Not that she would have

cared for anyone to take her good advice and prosper by it. I don't think that would have given her much pleasure. Though I am not at all slow to spot it if a piece of advice is good and to take it, if it comes my way, what she had to offer was not worth considering and ran like water off a duck's back, off me. I know exactly what I am aiming at and am more than a little inclined to be a Home Ruler when it comes to the management of my own private affairs.

Mrs Pitkeathly knitted ceaselessly as she talked. I pondered and remembered that the woman who behaved the most outrageously in the whole hotel used to knit a lot too. There's something about knitting that franks a woman to any degree of behaviour. If a woman knits it sets a seal of purity on her. She can break every one of the Commandments in turn or simultaneously with impunity. Not that I can say that Mrs Pitkeathly broke them, but I must say I think she bent them a bit, and if she hadn't knitted such a lot people would have noticed her mischief-making much more. But their gaze in spite of themselves fastened on the knitting. They were hypnotised by it and only saw her good and woolly works staring them in the face.

We could often see Celia, in a trotty little skating kit of dull flame-colour with touches of black on it, practising on the rink, from where we sat, and she would try to pick my brains about her, but got very little change out of me. And she would, but very cautiously, try to run her down to me.

This I would not allow. How could anyone deny Celia's goodness and sweetness ? It was perfectly patent to all of us who really knew her, for it took such an active form. It was the infectious kind of goodness too and she scattered the germs of it wherever she went. Not the dormant High Church microbes, but those of the real fundamental thing itself.

Come, come, Mrs Pitkeathly said, she had watched Celia carefully for years and her mode of living and

choice of occupations reminded her of nothing so much as of a puppy dog chasing its own tail. She never achieved anything or got anywhere. She did not sit on committees or go on platforms, so she didn't see how on earth she could be called a good woman.

I told her gently that people who were really busy doing good hadn't any time to amuse themselves by doing such things. They left that to the people who were anxious to advertise themselves as well-doers but who, beyond wearing the appearance of well-doing and looking important when they weren't, did not take any real interest in the good of the community or give any of their own money in charity, only begged it of other people and took the credit for themselves. Celia's operations were on too big a scale to waste time so she could only hope to get through them by keeping clear of committees and organisations and she was working silently and strenuously. Every now and again an explosion of effort to which she had contributed largely, by suggestion and money, took place at some distance from where she was, and no one connected her with it. This suited her best, for if people are watching you they are sure to be criticising you and this hampers you. She did quantities of good deeds but remembered the admonition about not letting your right hand know what your left hand was doing, which words, if you looked into them, you would perceive to constitute a text and an epigram in one.

I could count up heaps of people who had been anything but nice and Celia had broken them in and made them quite charming. There were mistakes made at times, but we all of us made them. There was the case, I recollected, of Mr Wotherspoon, who bore the marks of a dissolute life and self-indulgence of the most complete sort, wine, women, song, the whole list, in every line of his face and figure and bearing. She worked hard with him, threw her whole soul into it, spent days and weeks and months of her valuable time in his society, only to find, too late, that his was, and always

had been, the life of a blameless ascetic. A man who, when the weather was too damp or his mother was not well enough to go to church, read half the service through to her in her bedroom. It was a set-back but it is better to err on the side of over-zealousness than the other, and her failures did not nearly balance her successes. Did Mrs Pitkeathly realise that she had reformed me? And I had been a sad dog in my day.

Mrs Pitkeathly said "Really!" and asked for details of my awful past with avidity. I refused to give them, saying it was not possible for me to do so, for they would not have been suitable for her ears.

She got sulky and said that all she could say was that if all Celia's work was as badly done as it was in my case, it didn't say much for it!

"Why, Mr Blenerhassett, all I can say is that it's work only half done!"

"Celia says I am doing nicely, Mrs Pitkeathly. I began by being too much of a prig, and then she took me in hand and I went to the other extreme and then she took me in hand again, and as I say, thinks I'm doing nicely. It's been delightful." I heaved a sigh of content.

"Well, nevertheless I still say, Mr Blenerhassett"—and she puffed herself up ominously—"that of all my acquaintances——"

"Say friends, Mrs Pitkeathly, *do*."

"Of all my *acquaintances*, Mr Blenerhassett, I consider there are more possibilities of moral downfall about you than I see in any one of the others!"

"Good gracious, Mrs Pitkeathly."

She waved her knitting excitedly.

"Why just take one point alone—the—er—the women's and—er—the girls' legs—and ankles"—(here she bridled her head)—"I've never seen a man take a more extraordinary amount of—er—interest in such things than you do, Mr Blenerhassett. It's positively morbid!"

"I fail to see anything morbid about a good leg, Mrs

Pitkeathly. It's an excellent and an attractive thing. In a way that's what I like so much about this place. One—er—sees so many of them about."

I pulled at my very short moustache (I was just growing one) meditatively, looking towards the rink.

"Mr Blenerhassett!"

"I assure you, Mrs Pitkeathly, that even if I do like them, and talk of them now and then in an off-hand way—I only refer to—er—or mentally visualise the—er—how shall I say—er—oh yes—the—the—*drumstick* portion. I only refer to them from the *knee downwards*."

"I should *hope* so—I should *hope* so, Mr Blenerhassett!" bringing the full force of her mighty diaphragm to bear upon this word.

I quailed before the blast of her disdain, and held on to my chair.

"But it's only a passing phase. Don't condemn me utterly. People are often very frivolous at first and afterwards quite change. I've seen it happen over and over again. I'm quite sure that before so very long I will settle down into a very staid and respectable person and never even give a thought to such things any more. It's coming on me by degrees and I'm very pleased about it and I hope when it has come on fully that we shall meet again. Wait till I have become really refined and a judge, for I——"

Mrs Pitkeathly interrupted me by lifting her hand:

"The one is possible, but the other——"

She shook her head slowly and mournfully two or three times, and pursed her lips.

"I'm afraid you are indulging in a little sarcasm at my expense. Can this be so, Mrs Pitkeathly?"

But she only shook her head, and pursed her lips again.

I referred a little while back to an accident of birth which had debarred her from the enjoyment of certain privileges which otherwise might have been hers. I also put down a note that it was thanks to her having a

great number of powerful relations that we were able to hit back at her a little.

But I ought rather to say that it was the combination of these two things which enabled us to torment her a bit for a change, instead of her tormenting other people.

It was a somewhat involved and delicate matter. I don't quite know whether it was quite the right topic of conversation for an attractive bachelor with long eyelashes, and a large and deeply religious woman. But I asked Celia and she said go ahead.

It began this way (Mrs Pitkeathly and I were as usual sunning ourselves on the verandah).

"You know of course, Mr Blenerhassett, that I am entitled to bear arms."

"Bare arms, Mrs Pitkeathly?"

I glanced at her sideways. I thought this was rather an odd conversational opening on her part for I knew that to her, arms, especially bare arms, would only be second in impropriety to ankles and legs.

"Certainly, Mrs Pitkeathly. Why not? I think you look all right—I mean—very well in evening dress. I don't know that I——"

"Tut-tut. I don't mean what you mean. I am referring to the armorial bearings of my family, which I am entitled to bear or carry. To have engraved on my silver, painted on the panels of my carriage if I could afford one, or have carved on my furniture or moulded over the front door as common people do when they first get a title."

"Ah, I see what you mean. Of COURSE I always guessed you must come of a very fine family. That's easily seen."

"Ah, but I don't know whether you know that had I been born a little baby boy instead of a little baby girl that I should have been the holder of a great title and enormous estates."

"I'm afraid I haven't heard."

"Yes, I was the only child of my father, who if HE had lived would have succeeded his grandfather and come into some four titles (one in abeyance) and as many places, and in all, about, I think, a hundred and fifty thousand acres in the best counties."

Sure enough, I looked her up, and as well as I can remember she was the great-great-granddaughter of the late Lord Sandon of Kingarth, 15th Baron of that name, and Baron Lieven of Kintyre in Scotland. On his mother's side of the Milesian princely House of Inniscorrig; and who also sat as representative peer for Ireland in the House of Lords as Lord Morvaine. Adjudged by the Committee of Privileges to be 4th Viscount Strathaven (but decided to leave this title temporarily dormant and continue to be known by that of the earlier patent of nobility). Master of the Glen Vale Buckhounds, Member of the Royal Company of Archers, King's Bodyguard for Scotland, A Knight Justice of St John of Jerusalem. Lord of the manor of various places. Patron of twelve livings, and hereditary something-or-other of the British Museum.

Had the gods so willed it or had it been written on the scroll of her life by the headless ladies of the group of Elgin Marbles, to wit, the three Fates, who sit in the darkest corner of the mansion of which she had so nearly been a hereditary something-or-other, she would have come in for all this magnificence.

She discussed the matter with me, and I saw that she put it down to some mental oversight or moral weakness on the part of her mother, a poor feckless body not equal to an emergency of this kind. Something like Mrs Dombey, who had never been known to make an effort in her life, and who ought to have known that to bring her into the world as a girl was to rob her of everything that was hers by rights. It was almost criminal carelessness. Luckily for her, Mrs Dombey—I mean, the late poor Mrs I-forget-her-name—died not

very long after her mistake was made, and so was spared the unhappiness of meeting the accusing gaze of her large progeny, who no doubt would have served her up a dish of reproaches with unfailing regularity.

I take it that Mrs Pitkeathly favoured her father. He was a man, if you like, she said. Looking at her, I thought he might have been a forceful person and perhaps, thought I, the poor weak lady who had been her mother for a short time may have taken the wisest course in the affair after all. Thinking of Mrs Pitkeathly as I knew her, and thinking of the powers of oppression and suppression and of the possibilities of the misdirecting and misusing of so much wealth and position, I think she had.

Everything, all the houses, manors, demesnes, parks, and city properties had gone to a distant cousin, who came back from the Colonies to take them up and who was full of ridiculous ideas. He gave most of the money away and let people in to see his houses for nothing, and generally behaved idiotically and socialistically.

"Yes, if I had not been born a dear little girlie—they tell me I had pretty clinging ways—but had instead been a little boy, I should have filled the great position to which he lends so little dignity, infinitely better."

It was sufficiently hard to dematerialise a mountain of flesh into a little girlie with clinging ways, but my brain positively refused to first dematerialise her from her vast self, sitting there in Harris tweed, and to then rematerialise her to a chubby crowing baby boy in cambric and corals, cutting his teeth.

I gave it up. Celia says my imagination is beyond everything, but this I could not tackle. Besides it would have seemed like taking a liberty with her to even think of such a ponderous, awe-inspiring person as a baby, either boy or girl. I really couldn't do it.

"Not, Mr Blenerhassett, that I mind for myself, but it would have been so nice for Arthur."

Arthur is her son.

"No, I am not what you would call a greedy woman. No one will ever say that of me."

They hadn't said that, but they had said everything else.

"I do not care for pomp and circumstance. I find my pleasure with simple things among simple people."

"Sure."

"And so in a measure I do not regret the ownership of those vast estates and possessions. The responsibility they entail must be very great."

A momentary tremor came into her voice and affected me just a little. After all, I thought, whatever her bad points were, and they were many, it had been bad luck on the old bird to have so narrowly missed all these great things.

So I said to console her "Quite right, Mrs Pitkeathly. After all don't forget that it is not so much having nice things that makes one happy, as that not having them makes one miserable. If you analyse the thing and think it over carefully you will find it loses its sting."

I was just going on to remind her in a roundabout way that had she been rich her life would have been less interesting to her for she would have had no excuse for all her little meannesses and hagglings. But a sudden thought struck me and I hardened my heart, and decided I did not want to console her. On the contrary I saw that I had at last discovered where her vulnerable spot lay.

"I don't think of myself in the matter," she continued. "It is not a selfish regret that comes over me at times, but dear Arthur would have benefited so if things had been otherwise and I should have been gratified to know that he would in his turn inherit them. For the fact remains that had I been born a boy, he would have done so."

"Ah, but pardon me, the fact does not remain, Mrs Pitkeathly."

"What do you mean, Mr Blenerhassett?"

We always addressed each other with much ceremony.

"What do you mean, Mr Blenerhassett?"

"I mean that if you stop to think about it, and even if you don't, if you had been the heir to the title and estates, Arthur would not have been your son."

And now we come to the portion of the conversation that I fear might not be considered quite proper.

"*Arthur would not have been my son!* Whatever do you mean? Whose son would he have been I'd like to know?"

"I don't suppose he'd have been anybody's son."

"My *dear* Mr Blenerhassett, you're simply talking nonsense. Everybody has to be somebody's son. *That* seems obvious enough to me."

"Yes, certainly, and you put it very well and very clearly. But not only is everybody somebody's son, but the son of two somebodies. That is the point I am trying to make."

It was a difficult point to lay before her. As delicately as possible and without wounding her tender susceptibilities, I wanted to remind her that Arthur could not possibly have been the result of any other union than of that between her and the late Mr Pitkeathly.

Arthur is quite—— But there!

"I suppose I am very dense." She laid down her knitting. "I must own I cannot see what that has to do with it."

"Well, look at it this way for a moment. If your mother had fulfilled her duty to you as admirably as you have fulfilled your duty to Arthur it would not have left you in a position to have married the late Mr Pitkeathly."

"Wait a moment. What's that you say? Wouldn't have left—— No, I dare say not, but I'd have married someone else, wouldn't I?"

"Yes, you'd have married someone else and you'd have had children we hope, and no doubt you'd have been an excellent father."

"Father ? ! "

"Yes, father. *Not* mother."

"Oh-h-h, I see what you mean NOW. You mean that——"

"Exactly."

"That's rather an interesting point. I'd never thought of that before. If I hadn't married Mr Pitkeathly, Arthur couldn't—wouldn't—— But it's waste of time discussing these things. Besides I don't think it's quite nice. You might as well bother your head by asking yourself who you would, or wouldn't be—if—if——"

"Yes, or who anybody would be if—if——"

"What a one you are to put strange ideas into people's heads. I often wonder where you get them. But it's not surprising they come to you, as you spend your whole day with your nose glued to a book. Such waste of time."

Mrs Pitkeathly's contempt of people who read books is only equalled by her contempt of those who write them.

"Arthur is *entirely* my son."

"Really ? "

"Mr Blenerhassett. That will do. As long as you are prepared to discuss things properly and nicely I haven't any objection to your sitting by me and talking."

"Sorry, Mrs Pitkeathly."

"As I say. Arthur entirely favours me and I am quite correct in saying that he is a son of mine. He shows no traces of his father's people at all and I am positive that he would have upheld the family traditions so much more successfully than the present man, who, as I say, I cannot help in a measure regarding as an interloper."

I turned the conversation. There was nothing to be gained by pursuing it and making her see that Arthur could never under any circumstances have succeeded to her forefathers. It needed too subtle a sifting of circumstances to ever come within reach of her

rather embryo intelligence which was only lit up by gleams of cunning. So, as I say, having established the fact that the loss of all these worldly goods and brilliant possibilities rankled sorely with her both for her own and Arthur's sake, I quite cruelly never lost an opportunity of reminding her of it. I drew her out with regard to each historic mansion, its state of repair, its park-lands and the number of fallow-deer as apart from the celebrated fancy herd, the world-renowned and unique Mongolian blue-horned mountain cattle. And got a list of the Art treasures of each noble dwelling, china, furniture, pictures, decorations. She confided to me that in one the Elizabethan banqueting hall was used as a stable, and that to her way of thinking it would have been an ideal occupation to restore it to its ancient uses, putting instead the horses into some properly built modern stables. Also how she would have conducted vast draining operations on certain marshy low-lying lands, neglected and despised by the Colonial, and added another several thousands of acres of good agricultural land to the estates and several thousands a year to the rent roll. In another property there were undoubted traces of valuable coal seams, and these she would have prospected and investigated. The Colonial said he preferred scenery to coal-pits and never took a single step in the matter.

I found out that she made pilgrimages as an ordinary tourist, to first one and then another, on visitors' days when the family was not in residence (not being on terms with the unspeakable Colonial and his wife) to worship at the shrine of the various gems of art, and see whether they were being cared for or not. Indulging in long pow-wows with the old librarians, distant connections and hangers on to the family greatness. Quite methodically and cold-bloodedly I extracted descriptions from her of the shape, size, and periods of the aforesaid historic mansions and details as to their situations and elevations, carefully noting them till I was able to put a perfectly constructed

vision-model before her, and haunt and harass her by talking of them and reminding her of them, especially of those about which she fretted most and which had taken most hold on her imagination. I worked so assiduously that for almost the remainder of the stay I left her neither time nor inclination for the brewing of mischief. I am sure it was very mean of me, but there are occasions when one must take a pragmatist's view and consider that the end justifies the means.

There were days when the Foehn came up the valley and drove before it a soaking sodden pale mist that wrapped itself like a damp blanket all over the lovely clear-cut mountains and piled itself heavily on the hotel, so that almost without warning the entire little motley world contained therein, men, women, matrons, children, girls, boys, found themselves unable to get out to follow their usual pursuits. Then letter-writing in corners began, and newspaper and book reading, bridge and patience playing, and groups sat around chatting, thrashing out indoors all that had occurred outdoors for some time past, or that was likely to happen in the near future. Games used to be started in the big ballroom or the palm court and caused a lot of fun among the younger members. These were the sort of days after Mrs Pitkeathly's own heart. She would view the romps with disapproval and find scope for censure, butting in if she could and spoiling sport. She had had all the cosy corners put down, whenever there were dances. None were allowed now, and the seasonal crop of engagements had declined ever since.

I never let her far out of my sight these days. I'd limp after her—by now she considered me quite her property—and I'd engage her and her confederates, whose teeth seemed to have been quite drawn by my simple strategy—in conversation. After a while of desultory chat on the general unutterableness of the weather very likely I'd say :

"What was that you told me about the licence to

crenellate that your ancestor got in the reign of Edward the Third ? "

The confederates' eyes would bulge out of their heads at the mention of a lineage authenticated to such dim and far-back times. Mrs Pitkeathly would settle herself down preparatory to being thoroughly harrowed by my questions. She'd go over the old story again for me, though I knew it backwards by now from her long and precise descriptions of Bulmer. I led her on further.

" I always forget whether it is the façade of Bulmer which has the engaged columns with volute capitals supporting two cupolas of which the tympanum of one is filled with an allegorical figure of Apollo, and the other, of Mars. Or is it the one of which Leybrug, the great architect of Queen Anne's time, rectified the sky-line, and added another storey ? "

" No, no, dear Mr Blenerhassett. No, no. You've got that quite wrong. If you'll only think a moment you would realise that it would be a hopeless anachronism to combine such different architectural features as engaged columns supporting cupolas with statues in their tympana, with massive stone crenellations, as well as deep embrasures for the bowmen and archers. I don't deny that there are two very small cupolas, at the extreme back and which you unfortunately can see from the great entrance gates. But you can only just see them and though not strictly correct they were handled very successfully really and have a distinct mediæval Gothic angularity about them, as they are hexagonal, and not round, with small fixed vanes of mediæval ironwork. You cannot speak of storeys as regards height in this case. It consists of a series of strong towers with connecting corridors and buttresses."

" Ah, I forgot. I know now. I get a little mixed sometimes. You spoke of the great entrance gates just now. Let me be quite clear about them. These are the magnificent examples, with the clairvoyees to

the outer court with the mythical birds—or are they falcons ?—figuring as supporters on top of the principal piers——"

"Those are the gates of Scrope, dear Mr Blenerhassett, but we were talking of Bulmer. That's a very different matter. The Bulmer gates are thirteenth century, the ones at Scrope are much, much later. Don't you REMEMBER ? I described them fully to you about three or four days ago and you made notes and even a rough pencil sketch, I think."

"OF COURSE. At Scrope there are two large cartouches, of which one has the Staveley arms, impaling those of Margrave under a ducal coronet——"

"Yes, that's right. The house having come into the family through a marriage contracted with a great heiress of a ducal family, since extinct——"

"—and on the left-hand side the Margrave arms are placed as a shield of pretence on azure, a sword engrailed or representing the Margrave arms with an altered tincture."

"Yes, and as you will certainly recollect, for you specially wrote it down, on the iron balustrading to the stone staircase and on the descent from the oak staircase to the garden you again find the ducal coronet, while the pedimented doorway it leads from bears the Margrave estoile and the Milesian sword. But by far the richest ironwork—oh, how I wish you could see it, as you seem to take a real interest in these things—are the overthrows to the two forecourt gateways owing to the beautiful effect that was obtained by the free use of elaborate embossed acanthus leaves, draperies and spiral coils ! "

Mrs Pitkeathly almost rocked on her chair at the thought of them.

"Yes, Tijon himself superintended the work in person, and you know what a master craftsman he was ! "

"What a wonderful, wonderful place it must be. I once stayed with some people near there, and though

we often drove in that direction and I saw it fairly plainly in the distance I never went in. Is it as wonderful inside as it is outside ? "

Mrs Pitkeathly would draw her breath in with a hissing noise, and purse her lips portentously.

" I should say so indeed ! "

Settling herself once more in her chair and taking a long pull at her ball of wool she would now embark on a lengthy description of the beauties of Scrope.

" To begin with, as you enter and before you get into the main or central portion (you know there are thirty staircases there), you descend by a short flight of shallow stairs into the Long Hall. It is about a hundred feet long, with carvings by Wren and a series of paintings on panels by Holbein, and there on stands specially constructed for the purpose and set out in two long double rows are all the embossed and illuminated vellums setting forth the grants of lands and privileges and the patents of nobility, and deeds conferring titles. Then from there you pass to the picture gallery. It is lit from sconces of beaten silver of the time of Charles the Second and is hung with Van Dycks, Rembrandts, Jansens, Franz Hals, Holbeins, Quentin Matsys—oh, quantities of great masters, and there is also the celebrated portrait of my ancestor, Sir Roger Godolphin de Beauregard, the Standard-Bearer. Then you ascend the grand staircase of which the entire walls and dome sections are covered with frescoes in brownish monochrome—which I confess I think a little depressing—by a very celebrated Dutchman, of mythological subjects, with painted mouldings to represent inner frames and divisions of panelling and in some cases even statuary in niches."

" By Jove, that must have taken some doing ! " I interjected.

" This part is exceedingly cleverly managed as also is the perspective and the shadows cast by the painted statuary. There was a great law case about the payment for these. The artist wanted far too much money

but he didn't get it! A most rapacious person he was. But the part of the house that by the experts is thought far and away the most of and a perfect example of proportion, is the Quadruple Library, a series of four rooms in all with a central dome—which I am told is square on the plan, though I don't know what it means, for I know it is round inside and everything in it is round too. There's a circular moulded wreath of flowers and fruit on the ceiling and underneath it, and corresponding to it in size exactly, the most unique circular Chinese carpet which was taken from a temple and dates from the Kien Lung period. Need I say the whole series of rooms is decorated in the Chinese manner and furnished with the most priceless Chinese red lacquer. The only one of the series in which the Chinese note does not predominate is in the last room, which was ruthlessly stripped and redecorated by some vandal about the middle of the seventeenth century, who mounted a Monkey and Scaramouche ceiling in it. Petits Singeries they call the designs. Some people say it's wonderful, and in a way it is, and one could tolerate it if one didn't know that the earlier work had been torn away to make a place for it. The monkeys are skipping and running about in different costumes, rowing, boating, fishing, shooting. It's very peculiar and has its charms—I suppose. The mantelpieces are of Fior di Pesca marbles in panels framed with alabaster carved to represent pagodas and palm-trees. But the china collection is wonderful. There is a series of the most unique peach blow vases, about eighty of them, separated into sets of five, each set specially made to be placed on the points of the lacquer cabinets of which there are four in each room. And oh, the china in the cabinets—Mr Blenerhassett—if you could only see the china in the cabinets——!"

Here she began to get quite agitated and sniff—and hunt in her tweed pockets for her handkerchief. Probably by now she was really almost on the verge of tears at the thought of the china in the cabinets, so I would

sit up anxiously, and try to head her off on to something else as quickly as I could. I didn't want tears.

"Never mind about the china to-day, Mrs Pitkeathly. Don't bother, I'm not really so sure that I care about china. In fact, in comparison to a great many other things I'm really not keen on it. I much prefer, for instance, tapestry. Are there any good tapestries at Norton Constable?"

"Are there any good tapestries at Norton Constable?!! My dear good Mr Blenerhassett. We have some of the finest tapestries in the world there, some of the very finest specimens of early Flemish fifteenth-century weaving in existence. To begin with, there's the entire set reproducing (and made almost at the same time and by the same workers) the set which represents the Hunts of the Emperor Maximilian, designed by Bertram D'Orly, and the originals of which hang in the Louvre. Then in one of the State bedrooms at Bulmer there is a Brussels set of Diana the Huntress and the Vandam set representing Perseus as a Roman warrior drawing his sword against the monstrous guardian of Andromeda. And in the bedroom opposite there are four subjects occupying the walls of which the scenes are taken from mythology. In the first Zeus makes love to Io, and in the second Hera, his wife, who is naturally irritated changes her into a heifer. Then Zeus puts the entire flock into the charge of Argus with his hundred eyes. But by Hera's request, Argus is lulled to sleep by Hermes, who plays to him on his flute and, as soon as he has got him asleep, chops off his head. The last panel shows Hermes presenting the head of Argus to Hera, who receives it with delight because by his sleeping when on guard Io has been able to escape, and she is once more in her power. But not knowing what to do with the hundred eyes, she bestows them on the tail of the Peacock."

There is no doubt about it but that in the matter of tapestry Mrs Pitkeathly condones all sorts of immoral goings-on, I'm afraid.

This sort of thing went on fairly regularly as long as my foot prevented me from leading an active life, in all about three weeks. We'd begin by conversing about all manner of things and I by degrees would bring up the topic of her unfortunate accident of birth. Under the guise of friendliness, as she bewailed her lack of fortune in the matter, I professed sympathy—hypocritically making clucking noises with my tongue on my palate indicative of the pity of the whole thing. My tongue got quite sore with tut-tutting and ached for days, but I made her heart ache into the bargain. My heart smote me at times, for the only good thing about Mrs Pitkeathly was her affection and appreciation of these fine old relics of the past around which the memories of her forbears clung. But even after making due allowance for this side of her we still recognised her as a malicious old body, standing badly in need of correction.

As soon as ever my foot got better I went back post-haste to all the sports and games I had had to give up for so long. I was wild to make up for lost time, and so consequently saw very little of her or the confederates, and she naturally went back to her old occupations without delay.

Before very long Celia came to me and said :

" Peter ! That old woman has been up to her tricks again ! "

" O lordy ! " said I. " What is it now ? "

" You know little Daisy was getting on quite nicely with young Soames, the nice clean boy with the white even teeth ? "

" Yes. Yes. I noticed it."

" Well, they were getting on extremely well, and I'll tell you exactly how I know and you needn't say I was imagining it." (We were rather fond of telling each the other that things were imagined.) " He asked me quite seriously whether I thought Daisy liked him. In fact he drew me aside and asked me so solemnly that I knew exactly what he was thinking of doing. I said yes I

was sure she liked him. Now that's only about ten days ago and yet now he spends every spare minute he has in the company of that girl that wears the cherry sweater. And even if she does look nice I don't think she is. I think she's horrid."

"Oh yes, she's a horrid girl. I know her!" This was the one who had sneaked my luge.

"So of course he and Daisy are at loggerheads and poor Daisy out of pique is running after that big handsome Morris boy like a lunatic, and he's the regular lady-killer type, and will only let her down in favour of another girl presently and then things will be worse than ever for her. I introduced them and feel responsible for the whole thing."

This was a fact. When we rescued Daisy from Mrs Pitkeathly's clutches she knew no one, and we had trotted her out and passed her along to all the young things we could find. And Celia had raked out a lot of finery and given it her, and her maid had fixed her up with two fluffy ball dresses run up in a hurry, but that looked very nice all the same, and with a little luck we felt that Daisy was in for a better time.

I questioned Daisy and we saw at once how the land lay. Mrs Pitkeathly had cornered her and taxed her with having taken a fancy to Soames and said that everybody was noticing the way she was running after him. This of course made little shy Daisy wild with hurt pride and she dried up like an oyster whenever Soames came near her. Then he didn't come near her, thinking he had annoyed her, and then she was hurt, and said something off-hand about him before Mrs Pitkeathly which she believes she must have repeated to him, for shortly afterwards she cornered her again and told her something derogatory which she said Soames in his turn had remarked about her. That of course settled it and now she and he were dead cuts.

Not only did we trace Daisy's troubles directly to her, but a poor little married lady, rather frivolous of aspect, but truly harmless, came to Celia in tears and

told her a story of how she and some others went out on a sheeing party and a frightful storm beset them. They all got separated, except herself and a man friend, who, fortunately for her, stayed with her and helped her to beat her way through the blinding snow. Without his assistance she likely would have perished, but thanks to him they reached the hut on the mountain and she was so exhausted that they stayed there till next morning as it would have been madness to face the blizzard again ; the others had wandered about for hours and got back to the hotel almost dead with fatigue. It was unfortunate that she and her escort were left alone there unchaperoned, but this was a thing that was liable to happen to everyone who undertook these expeditions. There was nothing in it, it had often happened, and would often happen again. But her husband was a choleric Argentine, very much inclined to be jealous of his young wife, and the affair of the hut rankled ; though probably the memory of it would have died away but that Mrs Pitkeathly—and she was insistent about this—would not let the matter rest. She spoke of it and kept it fresh in his mind. She was insistent, too, that in some funny subtle way, though without actually saying it, she had given him the idea that people gossiped about it a lot and thought there was something behind it, and the result of it was to make him feel that he looked a fool and that he was to some people an object of pity, and to others an object of derision. He was consequently making her life a burden to her and told her he had lost all confidence in her. She couldn't say where it would end.

It would end in a scandal, poor thing, for Mrs Pitkeathly was already going her rounds with a heavy " I-could-a-tale-unfold " manner, which presaged ill for her. We knew the signs and portents so well that without any ado Celia intervened, and before the week was out both this and the other imbroglio were straightened out satisfactorily. Having disposed of them we turned our attention to Mrs Pitkeathly in dead

earnest. Celia said she hadn't the slightest compunction. She had already wreaked enough mischief to retire and gloat over it by her fireside in her old age. We could not wrest these memories from her, but we could prevent her garnering any more. Celia said her one regret was that she had not done it sooner instead of selfishly enjoying herself, skating and bobsleighing.

We, that is, Soames and Daisy, now engaged, and Celia and I, had a long and solemn pow-wow, and the upshot of it was that we dropped a note to Madame Morton asking her if she could come up to Celia's sitting-room next evening after dinner.

Monsieur and Madame Morton were old friends of ours and their familiar faces greeted us kindly year after year at Lautersimmen. They were an awfully jolly couple of prosperous business people, well known for their generosity and charities. Monsieur had great *usines* somewhere beyond Paris, connected I think with iron foundries working in conjunction with coal mines and shipbuilding. Madame was a tall buxom well-dressed woman, in her forties, with breezy manners and a lively, brown, freckled face; Monsieur was tall and thin, an exquisite skater, of an irreproachable appearance, always dressed in dark, correct English tweeds or homespuns. His face was dark and bright, and it was one whole joke. It was very thin with deep lines in the cheeks and round the clean-shaven mouth and each line was full of jokes; jokes for young and jokes for old, jokes for all. And in each of his two bright hazel-brown eyes (glancing gaily like those of a bird) were heaps and heaps of other jokes, all kindly and good-natured. And yet over all was a veil as of something serious. Everybody loved him and wherever he went the circle opened and swallowed him up and presently you heard roars of laughter. He was, nevertheless, very quiet in his manner, and his jokes were all quiet jokes. He did not gesticulate much, only occasionally waving one fine thin hand and giving a half shrug. These, with his

funny, whimsical smile, which hardly ever left his face, gave point to his humour and made him a personality once encountered, never to be forgotten. He and Madame were hailed with joy wherever they went and their presence gave zest to everything.

"I've given Madame a small hint as to what I wish to see her about. She hates Mrs Pitkeathly like poison and I'm sure she'll help. But the thing is will she help in the way we'd like her to?" said Celia, licking the flap of the envelope of the note she had just then addressed.

Madame duly presented herself at the time mentioned, and greeted us cheerily. We spoke in French and in English.

"Well, now, what have you two plotters got afoot? It is to do with Mrs Pitkeathly, hein?"

We said yes, and we indicated that we thought it was time that Nemesis had an extra feed of corn, and be let loose on her tracks, in the hopes of overtaking her and dealing with her according to her deserts.

"Well, I am yours to command. You know, dear Mrs Carmichael, how I have always disliked that woman. Je ne peut pas la sentir. That's what we say in French. But how shall we punish her? I cannot think of anything. I only wish I could."

"Don't bother. We've given a good deal of thought to the best means of doing so, and we think that the punishment should fit the crime."

"Ah, ha. Fit the crime. Yes, I know that phrase. It is from the comic opera, how do they call it—Meck-a-doo, n'est-ce-pas?"

"More or less. That's near enough. And to make the punishment fit the crime properly, it should embody in some way, something that is suggestive of or related to or adumbrates the crimes she has committed."

"Oh, la-la, Monsieur Peter. You use such long words. Tell me, Madame Carmichael, in simple ones, what does he say!"

"He says, Madame, that as Mrs Pitkeathly's crimes

have so often something to do with scandal-mongering, we must punish her by putting her in a position to have scandal talked about her."

"Scandal. About 'er. Ah mais non! Zat is imposseeble. Oh la-la-la-la!"

"Not as we are going to work it, Madame."

"Ah, I begin to see. You will *pay* somebody to make lofe to 'er! It will be very expenseeve!!"

Madame went off into shrieks of laughter.

"No, Madame, not quite that, but we will try to *persuade* someone to do it."

"Ah-ça! I see. But who?"

"Well, we thought that we must have someone of high courage——"

"Parbleu oui!"

"And of unblemished reputation——"

"Oui, oui."

"And who has a strong sense of humour——"

"C'est certain."

"And who is very kind-hearted——"

"Yes."

"And we think this description fits M. Morton exactly."

"Monsieur Morton! Monsieur Morton! Mon pauvre Jules!" exclaimed Madame, overcome by astonishment.

"Yes. None other. No one could possibly do it as well as he would," Celia said.

Madame now exploded into screams of laughter, and we had to wait some moments till she recovered.

"Ah-ha-ha-ha. I can just see them. Jules so thin and Madame Pitkeathly so fat! So colossale!!"

She had another relapse of frantic mirth and swayed about helplessly for a bit.

"What has he done that you should—what you call —what the Americans call—wish—wish this on to my poor Jules?!!"

And off she went again. But presently she recovered and, wiping her eyes, said:

"It is a good idea. I will persuade him. He will see the funny side of it, and the necessary side too. It will be a kind action. But it will be difficult. We must have an eselandre—a—a—blow-up—if we are to have a scandal."

We were relieved to see that she took it this way, for we had feared that she might not care for her Jules to be so martyrised. Also we knew that if she asked him he would certainly do it.

"My suggestion is, then, that if he is willing, Madame, that Monsieur should pay a lot of attention to Madame Pitkeathly, and by degrees win her confidence," said Celia.

"I am afraid," I added, "that he will have to screw himself up to some slight protestations of admiration——"

"He shall. He shall. I'll attend to that!"

"And then, somehow—and this won't be at all easy, but it's got to be done—we must inveigle——"

"Now, mon cher Monsieur Peter, what sort of a word is that?"

"Well, lure or persuade——"

"Ah, that's better."

"Persuade her to place herself in a more or less compromising situation with your husband——"

"And you will surprise them, Madame."

"Oof. How splendid. What a brilliant idea. I shall make a scene. But mon Dieu! What a scene!"

"And threaten disclosures——"

"And legal proceedings——"

"And between us all we will drive Mrs Pitkeathly from the hotel——"

"And next time she starts talking scandal, the horror of what she is doing——"

"Will come over her with a rush and she will never do it again!!"

"It is a *good* plan," said Madame, rising. "I will go down now and begin to tell Jules. It will take me a little time to get him to say yes, but he is an artist, and

a man of charity, and he will do it. Il a bon cœur. He will do it I know, for it needs someone trustworthy, who will carry it through."

The main difficulty was to devise some means of getting her into a situation that would appear to appear sufficiently compromising. Madame Morton would not be hard to satisfy. She would exclaim and rave and rage to order, but we would have to make it quite certain that Mrs Pitkeathly should consider herself cornered, and not leave her any loophole for a satisfactory explanation. Nor indeed leave, as it were, any loose edges to our arrangements likely to betray the fact that it was a put-up job, for she was a sly old thing and would have guessed quickly if there were any.

This was not easy, not at all easy, and Monsieur Morton had already been hard at work for quite a time (after a good deal of preliminary coaching by me as to clairvoyees and cupolas with statues on their tympana and tapestries with what his own countrymen would call " crimes passionels " worked patiently thereon with the point of the needle, and leading to a good deal of conversational give and take) before I had a brain-wave suggesting a method of working it. Celia also had a brain-wave on the same lines almost, or for all I know, at the very same moment that I did, proving clearly that we have a strong affinity with one another. Scoffers and people who disbelieve in affinities would say that we both got the idea from the same source, to wit, the photograph of the great spiritualistic séance act in the new play that was all the rage, and which appeared in *The Pictorial Gazette*. The photograph arrested my attention because it was nothing but a blank, blank square, and the letterpress below it, which purported to be funny, said that the likenesses of the actors and actresses would have been excellent if they had been visible, but as the stage was in darkness you couldn't see them though they were all there holding one another's hands.

Darkness ! Holding one another's hands ! Eureka !

I sought out Celia and I said feverishly, "I've got it!"

"No, you haven't," she said. "*I've* got it."

"Wait till you hear mine——"

"Wait till you hear mine——"

"What is yours?" we both said in a breath, impressed, each by the manner of the other.

"A spiritualistic séance," I said speaking first and forgetting my manners.

"So is mine. I believe I must have told you already," suspiciously.

"No indeed you didn't. It's entirely my idea. You might just for once let me have the credit——"

"All right, take it. I can spare it perhaps better than you can."

"Celia, if you're going to quarrel with me over a little thing like this——"

"It's not a little thing. It's a most important thing, and whoever can claim the idea, it's a good one, and that's the main point. It is a really good one, quite the best that's struck us so far, and I think it can be worked. And luckily enough there has been a good deal of spiritualistic talk in the hotel lately. It's quite a craze just now, so that if we suggest it and rope her in for one it won't look odd or far-fetched."

"Not a bit. That's the beauty of it."

The trouble we took over that séance and the talk that went on about it for days! I had been appointed stage manager and had been given charge of all properties that might be needed for the performance, and the selection of a site, and several things of that sort. Where was it to be held? (To be as compromising as possible.) Who was to assist? (They must be people capable of holding their tongues and not liable to lose their heads at the last moment.) How could we get Mrs Pitkeathly to a séance? (She had denounced them as ungodly.) How could we get everyone out of the room again, so as to leave Mrs Pitkeathly and the heroic Morton there alone together? (This seemed an almost

impossible difficulty.) How to find an excuse for not turning on the lights when they left the room, so that Madame Morton should come in and find them in the dark still holding hands? (Part of the question answered itself, for Monsieur having once got hold of her hand would take care on some pretext or another to continue to hold it till the right moment; and Madame's entry we would arrange to occur at a given moment, for we were going to work with synchronised watches to obviate mistakes.)

It was an intensely complicated thing to work out, but we managed it. The séance was to take place in Monsieur's apartments, and the excuse for that would be that it was in a quiet corner and therefore suitable for the medium and the spirits. It would not be held in the sitting-room, but in the inner room which was Monsieur's dressing-room, and the excuse for that in its turn could be supplied by the spilling of a bottle of sticky hair-oil or something similarly nauseous-smelling accidentally on purpose, and so we could exclaim at it (Celia was to do this) and migrate as if by an afterthought to the inner room.

If we picked our assistants carefully from amongst some of her victims who were thirsting for her blood, they would have every interest in making things a success, and in lying low about it, both before and after. We would not have too many as the chairs they vacated on leaving the room would be conspicuous if too big a number were needed to seat them. Soames and Daisy measured a little high sofa or bergere in the dressing-room and found if the parties wedged themselves a little it would hold three, even if one of the three were Mrs Pitkeathly. And we decided that not only would she make one of the three, but that Monsieur Morton would make another, and that by being wedged in so beside her and left till the moment of his wife's entry, the compromising of Mrs Pitkeathly would be a foregone conclusion.

At first when we began to rehearse it, it seemed un-

likely that it would succeed, but first a little thing here, and then a little thing there cropped up and fitted in so nicely with our movements that they might have been specially put there to make everything go off just right. There was a heaven-sent speaking-tube just outside the sitting-room door. Dan posted here would get the warning whistle which would advise him of Madame's arrival, and on receipt of it he would call loudly to the spiritualists to come out and have a look at something really important, his photos of the great bob-sleigh race which he was supposedly developing in his room next door.

There would be a general rush, for the séance—we'd see to that—would not yet be in full swing. First one and then another would rush out, including the medium, Miss Smith, who was of course not a real one, but who had dabbled in spiritualism enough to have a good idea of how mediums behave at séances, and to be able to give a fair imitation of their little ways. So there would be a carefully rehearsed stampede, each person taking care to push his or her chair neatly away and so break up the ring. And then Mrs Pitkeathly would hear cries of " I *must* just have one look—do excuse me one moment—I'll be back in two or three seconds, don't begin without me "—and " Oh, what a fright I look. I think it's a horrid photograph." " Do tear it up, dear Mr De Courcy." In the scurry we would make the best possible use of a still more heaven-sent device. The good Bischoffscheim, who was ever on the look-out for anything to help his guests to be comfortable and to save them trouble and incidentally to save his company money, had put a switch by the door of the sitting-room which controlled the light in the dressing-room ; so that if you left the inner room light on and only perceived you had done so when you had reached the far-off sitting-room door, you could put it out without returning all the way back. This saved lots of electric light—and the situation for us. There was also a switch by the dressing-room door—the very door by

which Madame would enter, the very switch by means of which she would flood the room with light. For by a skilful confusing of the double control we would be able to ensure that Monsieur and Mrs Pitkeathly would be discovered by her in darkness holding each the other's hand and sitting so close as almost to appear to be embracing one another, like any couple of silly cosy-corner culprits of tender years.

With any luck at all the coup ought to go off with a bang. Two days before Madame had framed an excuse to go down to one of the big towns, to see a friend or do some shopping, or both, for if the surprise was to be complete, and Mrs Pitkeathly to be taken completely off her guard, it would be better for her not to be in the hotel till the moment had arrived. The tale would then bear the closest inspection from all sides.

Madame had friends living in some of the big houses scattered on the outskirts of the various towns. The offer of her society for a few days was an opportunity for a little mild Swiss gaiety to be got up on her account and a gathering together of old acquaintances. Some very large and very serious and prosperous family parties were arranged at which no doubt the wild doings up at the big hotels would be talked over with many head-shakes. These big winter sports gatherings are looked on very doubtfully by the sober residents of the country. I don't think they half like to see the gigantic solitudes of their great mountains disturbed by a reckless rapid society to the extent that has occurred of late years.

But it was inevitable. The march of Time. They shrugged their shoulders philosophically over them.

Celia and I accompanied her down and not having been into the valley for some time we found it a delightful change and the difference in the feel of the air was amazing. There had been a tremendous fall of snow in the night and as we slipped down slowly and

softly in the Drahtseilbahn, a series of sparkling and incredible panoramas, white to the point of awe, rose to meet us, we going lower and lower, and round and round the mountain.

I stood on the little platform of the car, beside the collector, a worthy fellow and a personal friend of mine. We passed each other any news that might be of interest mutually or severally. He was a superior fellow as well informed and well kept as all such people of the working classes are in Switzerland, and far from being numb to the beauty of what lay around him in his daily trek around and down, and around and up the great mountain's girth, he looked round him with honest pride and drew my attention to various points in the scene.

The deep snow, the divine snow, lay everywhere. And knee-deep in it the pine forests performed those stationary marches and motionless evolutions which never get them anywhere, but leave them with all the appearance of determined and rapid transit exactly in the same spot for ever. Each individual tree if you looked at it stood up prim and straight like a stiff white plume in a soldier's kepi. Down below the flurry during the night had been continuous and over everything that could be covered the snow had cast its muffling beauty. All wayside objects were white huddles and snowy bundles, cushiony topped, penthouse formed ; hedges and ditches were glorified with icicles. The sky, which seemed most strangely close, down and about us, was of a soft dun-white, surcharged with yet heaps more snow to fall and settle gently, gently. The air was still and softly thickened by the imminence of all there was in store yet. We skimmed in our sleigh along the side of the great long lake—our sleigh-bells making muffled music—and it was a lovely pale dim grey colour, dense against the snowy white thick-drifted banks that encompassed it on all its sides, and we peered into the fairy-like vistas of the white woodlands as we passed and saw into their intricate depths of mingled delicate white webs. Forests of

Brussels lace greyly glittering, draped with flounces of old greyish-white needle-point. The trees seemed to be beautifully shaped, rising pyramidally, extending evenly their white bough arms on all sides with white hands and white twig fingers spread out all heavily sifted and laden with the drifting, settling snowflakes, so that their outlines were thickened and one saw at a glance how symmetrical Nature is when she sets out unhampered by disabilities. Some shrubs held their branches like white drooping ostrich head-dress feathers, as worn by stately tall white ladies in satin at high Court balls; floating softly and curling richly in their fronds.

I perceived others that seemed like filmy sea growths translated into white and I also perceived that what an artist and painter of snow scenes once told me was true, and that in such a wintry landscape there are hundreds and hundreds of different shades and values of white. From the comparatively dark white of the lovely weak shadows, to the highest point of white light possible, where the sun touches the snow to a glistening dazzlement.

I write this to remind you of our surroundings, and that the hotel was high up in the mountain in the middle of white plains, and also that it should be recognised how self-sacrificing it was of Madame to brave the late journey upon the last train and face a long drive after dark amidst the flakes that fell so thickly on the night we had chosen to let loose Nemesis.

When the actual day came, we were on pins and needles all the day and could settle to nothing. We were overwrought and anxious from the fear that things might go wrong at the last moment. And even up to the eleventh hour Monsieur Morton was having trouble with Mrs Pitkeathly in persuading her to attend the séance. He had had no trouble whatsoever in persuading her to be flirtatious. He said his fears lay quite in the other direction. He was extremely

cynical about this, for, as he put it, though he had always known that a really good man was liable to go wrong almost at any moment, he did not think that the same thing applied to a really good woman. But now he knew it did. Mrs Pitkeathly was head over heels in love with him, in spite of the fact that she had long since reached the age when a woman no longer asks to be loved, but prefers instead to be feared.

She gave in to him about everything else, but she was coy about the séance and would not say either yes or no. Perhaps she wanted him to plead with her. Women, I find, like one to plead with them. But Monsieur Morton, all in a moment, fetched out of a mind which was totally bare of ideas, owing to the exigencies of the situation, and the feeling that time was breathing hard on his heels, an inspiration. He suddenly bethought him to work upon her curiosity, of which, as we know, she had a great deal. Had he thought of this before he would have spared us much anxiety. But better late than never. She gave in at once when he approached her upon this side. He hinted that it would be an excellent opportunity to get the medium to obtain inside information about a scandal which had caused the hotel to rock to its very foundations the year before, and in which four if not five or six very well-known society people were very nearly involved, but which caused the bitterest disappointment by fizzling out in the most disheartening way just as there seemed a reasonable chance of its resulting in a big flare-up. Many and many a time Mrs Pitkeathly had laid down the law about it and given no one the benefit of the doubt. But, poor soul, she'd had a wretched stock of details and nothing really definite to go by, and hadn't been able to bring things to a head or manufacture details. With luck and some perseverance at the séance the ins and outs of the matter might be got at and Mrs Pitkeathly might be gratified by hearing that things were even worse than she had dared hope. The medium would be got to press these

questions and not allow the spirits to evade them or wander from the point as the creatures so often do.

This palpitating question having been finally as good as settled irretrievably, there was nothing to do but to fret and fume till the appointed time should strike.

The morning came and went, meals were served; the afternoon wore on, and the evening was with us. I was clammy and bad-tempered. I called the conspirators together and gave them wrong directions, and it was not till they had soothed me down and repeated the directions I had given to them in calmer moments that I perceived that everyone had their work off as pat as could be. Not only that, but I got the feeling that I have sometimes had when I was captaining a team that was about to meet another one that we had challenged or who had challenged us—namely, that here under my hand was a team that was out to carry the matter we had on through to the end, and let nothing stand in the way of a victorious consummation.

All day the snow had continued to fall and the ground was piled high and the shovellers and sweepers almost gave up in despair. Various fixtures were postponed and in addition to the excitement in our breasts, owing to the uninvitingness of things outside, and people wandering unsettled in the hotel, uncertain whether to go in or go out, there was an excitement abroad in it which corresponded to and seemed to be part of the same excitement that possessed us.

I looked out of the great glazed vitrines of the palm court. The snow kept on and on accumulating. Madame would have a bitter journey and a difficult. There would be avalanches and mourning in the villages after this.

That night it was not till I had piloted them up to the corridor by Monsieur's suite that I felt the thing was in hand. As Burns says, the "best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley" and it's amazing what possibilities of derangement of even one's most care-

fully thought-out plans lurk in the sleeves of destiny. True, we had gone up night after night in a chattering bunch, without any persuasion or manœuvring ; but that was no guarantee that it would occur to-night, when it was imperatively necessary that it should.

Mrs Pitkeathly kept stopping to talk to people and people kept coming up to her and wanting to know how many you knitted plain or purled, or dropped when you turned the corner. A new stocking toe that didn't get into a ridge inside the boot had taken the hotel by storm. A stocking which, owing to some mysterious system of dropping and picking up of stitches in its making, clipped the wearer round the ankle and didn't come creeping down. I would have been all for this in the ordinary way, but not this night. I was afraid Mrs Pitkeathly might mention to what dark doings she was about to lend herself and that someone might dissuade her. Hotels are always crammed with people who want to dissuade everyone from doing anything they have made up their minds to do. And though once her mind was made up or she had set out to do a thing, Mrs Pitkeathly didn't often get turned aside—still there was a chance of its occurring. She moved with the speed of a glacier to-night. I weaned her away from her interrogators and coaxed her step by step to the lift. I kept close beside her, burdened with her impedimenta, smelling-salts, wool, shawl and book, fearing to let her out of my control. And yet to have showed too much eagerness would have been an error, to which her mind might have homed afterwards.

The hour was not early. For a carefully selected variety of reasons we chose to make it late. It ensured, as far as was humanly possible, Madame's arrival by giving her ample time for her snowy drive and allowing for delay in transit owing to deep snow on the railway line. This was a solid reason, a material one for not beginning too early. There was another reason, based on the psychology of the human mind, and one into which we had gone very carefully. We remembered

in connection with what we had planned that certain things can be done without loss of dignity in the eyes of the world—or loss of caste in the eyes of Society—in the daylight hours. Things which if indulged in then are regarded as mere bagatelles and frolicsome peccadilloes. But which if indulged in during the later hours when the hands of the clock point to the hour of midnight, or just before or after, are regarded as crimes which bring utter condemnation or social ostracism in their train. So that if a man and a girl hold hands at ten o'clock in the morning it's a good joke. If they do so at eight-forty-five in the evening it is also all right —or even at nine-fifteen. But at twenty minutes to ten P.M. it has begun to be risky and at a quarter after midnight the girl would be considered to be henceforth beyond the pale, and the man a bold bad fellow!

I never have been able to gauge why this should be so; there must be some reason or at any rate the echo of a reason. But like many other things which I don't understand, I was going to make use of it. Mrs Pitkeathly was to be found clasping Monsieur Morton's hand as close upon the striking of midnight as possible, and then nothing could save her. The explanation we'd give her for the holding of the séance then would be that according to Miss Smith the spirits were more get-at-able in the smaller hours of the night. That the old superstitions about the witching hour had been proved by psychical research to be quite justified. Strange bodies without substance were inclined to move and creep about then, tentatively, and if one said "Halt!" in a tone of authority the poor weak-minded things would stand still and allow themselves to be interrogated.

To fill in the time between getting upstairs and the commencement of the séance in the dark, and as it were to lead up to it, Monsieur had planned a farewell supper to be spread in his sitting-room; for it was getting towards the time of our dispersal to our several bournes. Here again little things fitted in nicely. The

encumbrances of the supper-table and the service, plates, glasses, knives and dishes, was an excellent excuse for adjourning into the inner room (in addition to the increased quietness favoured of the spirits). And if Mrs Pitkeathly tremblingly pointed to the supper-table and all the places set, when accused, as a proof of her not having sought to be alone with Madame's husband, Madame would refer scathingly to the debris of the feast as evidence of an orgy—indulged in surreptitiously when her back was turned ! ! It would be my business as property man to scatter about with an eye to artistic effect several empty champagne bottles which I had obtained from François the faithful. At the moment they were hidden in a cupboard.

Supper progressed merrily and Mrs Pitkeathly did not forswear the flowing bowl though she was never behind-hand in condemning the absorption of champagne or cup on the part of any of the other ladies staying in the hotel. Her conversation hovered around the subject of what questions, put by the medium, would elicit the most information from the spirits. She was determined to obtain light on the subject of the scandal if she could.

A gentle knocking made itself heard in the middle of a funny story which had materialised from out of one of the humorous creases in Monsieur's face. He paused and we looked at the door. It was not part of the proceedings that anyone should knock gently. Everything that was necessary to our well-being had been served, and François, handsomely tipped, had departed with the pressing injunction that he was on no account to return that night, but clear the table next morning. I stood up and went to guard the door, for any unforeseen arrival would put the entire series of arrangements out of joint. So I poked my head out cautiously, only opening the door a crack, and saw that there stood the man who held the strange theories about the world's lack of stability in the solar system, and that it was about to swerve from its orbit and meet a fiery end in a

collision with another planet. Dan, uneasily guarding the speaking-tube, seemed to be expostulating, and explaining that we were not to be disturbed, but without avail.

Hang the fellow, I thought. He will spoil everything. This is annoying! I closed the door tight behind me and stood with my back to it, and parleyed with Dan in stage asides whilst encouraging my loony friend to unburden himself of his great news. Dan said he was bent on getting hold of me because he said I was so sympathetic and never laughed at him when he confided in me. "Drat it!" thought I, "this comes of taking Celia's advice when she impressed on me that no matter how boring or absurd a person may be, I must treat them with courtesy. If I only had followed my own feeling in the matter——!"

Johnson the loony was apologising for having raised my hopes unduly by having prophesied the total destruction of the world for the week before last, and its not having come off. He'd made a mistake in his mathematical calculations, and now he saw that tonight was the night, and as his best friend, he wanted me to hear all about it before anyone else; and not to mention it, for it was no trouble, I assure you.

I felt I didn't mind whether the world did swing into space or not and get swallowed up by another system—but it must be after and not before Mrs Pitkeathly had been brought to book of her crimes. Just then Soames stuck his head out too, asking what it was.

"Nothing much," I replied, "except that my friend Johnson here says that in about two hours' time the end of the world is due. He's found it out by a series of careful investigations and he wants us all to come up on the roof and have a good view and not miss any of the fun."

This was the first Soames had heard of this agreeable little idea of Johnson's. He knew he was erratic but didn't know it ran to this quite. I winked at him and motioned him back to the room, and slipping my arm

affectionately through Johnson's we paced the corridor a few moments in deep consultation, and then as I couldn't find anyone else to turn him on to, I led him down to his own landing two floors down. He button-holed me in his febrile way, and poured out a farrago of astronomical terms, and scattered drawings of the solar system broadcast on his bed. He refused to let me go till he had got from me a solemn promise that I'd come to his room and bring the others and that we'd witness the end of all things from the comparative comfort of his balcony. I wondered how I'd keep him occupied for some time till then and prevent his worrying us upstairs and I therefore urged him to go and rouse everybody along his own floor, one after another, in rotation, and I left him at the first door, concluding that as it was a long corridor it would occupy him fully till it was too late to do us any harm by breaking in on us at the wrong moment.

I leapt up the stairs four at a time. Monsieur looked anxious as I came in ruffled and out of breath and sat down to a last morsel of chicken *béchamel*. The others had all finished and it was high time to get the séance started.

After that everything went as we had arranged. We had only just set ourselves down in our circle of chairs —and the little sofa—and put out the light and grasped each other's hands in a dark stillness only broken by our own breathing and heart-beats, when we heard down below, outside the window, in the night, a faint chime of sleigh-bells.

"Madame," I muttered, giving Celia's hand a great squeeze. I could have wished the séance had lasted longer, for all that it was an eerie business sitting there, pooling our magnetism in the dark. The warning whistle must have come up almost at once, for Dan burst in at the sitting-room door, and called on us all in stentorian tones to go and see what he had to show us, something far more important than any old séance, he said. I called back and opened the door and, as

arranged, the ring was broken and we trooped out, making our carefully rehearsed exclamations loud enough to be heard by Mrs Pitkeathly. With a few swift motions I knocked over a glass or two of champagne, placed the empties conspicuously, gave a twitch to the tablecloth and bumped against the switch which plunged the inner room in darkness—calling to Dan that I must also see—and staggering out, fell into the arms of Madame.

She clutched me. I clutched her. She had nearly been snowed up in the train, and the drive back was terrible. The sleigh driver hadn't wanted to undertake it—and how were things? I said they were in there *together*—all as planned. There was no time to lose—I broke off our whispered colloquy.

"Now, Madame. Now! Go in now!!!" And I bolted into Dan's room and left her to it.

We all huddled up together and listened and I think we all felt it was a mighty mean thing we were doing. But too late now to arrest the march of Fate! The walls were thin and we could hear everything. We heard her put the light on in the sitting-room, and then we heard her call "Jules," and then we heard her advance and turn on the other light, and then she uttered a long-drawn "Ah-h!" and then another "Ah-h!" And then we heard Monsieur's voice protesting volubly, and then we heard the voice of Mrs Pitkeathly full of alarm, and then we heard all three together, explaining, accusing, scolding, denying, protesting, declaring for fifteen to twenty minutes quite. And then one voice soared above the others. It was Madame's great denunciatory speech. I knew it by heart, for we had written it out together, and Madame had committed it to memory, and Celia and I and Jules each in turn had to listen while she did a *répétition* of it, until word-perfect.

Listening there the differences in pitch were very marked, and I observed what I had not noticed before, that a Frenchwoman pitches her voice a full seven notes

higher than an Englishwoman does. And for declamatory purposes this is excellent. She had told me, and listening to her I could well believe it, that she had spent a great deal of money in learning elocution, and taken many prizes for it at the convent where she was educated. Her first dramatic exclamation "Ah-h!" was produced as I have heard it done on the sacred boards of the *Comédie française*. It shot out right into the room in front of her and quivered and spent itself as though it had just developed there in the air, without any extraneous aid. That is how a voice should be produced. She wept realistically and her sobs through the thin wall sounded heart-rending. She had paid four hundred francs extra for a course in sobs, and the same sum for six lessons in hysterical, overwrought laughter. She told me afterwards some instinct had told her that they would be useful to her one day; and that she had practised hard down at her friend's house in the valley, and all the staff had thought she was mad, or very ill. She was leaning against the door of the inner room (no escape for anyone while she did that) and it rattled again with the violence of her grief.

Then Monsieur went on his knees, almost on time, and made frenzied appeals to her, and begged her for old times' sake to pardon him for having allowed his affections to wander. The provocation was great and it was the first time it had happened and would be the last. He had had lessons in elocution too. Wonderful people the French!

And Madame's sobs as she listened to him redoubled in vehemence. At first she was obdurate (for half-an-hour by schedule), but after he had reiterated his wild supplications three or four times she forgave him.

After another twenty minutes of elocution, more protestations and more sobbing, still with her back to the door (as per arrangement), she rang for her maid, and at this signal Daisy and Celia, and the wife of the Argentine went in to console her, and to turn horror-stricken

glances on Mrs Pitkeathly, humbled for ever more and for ever more in the dust. They were to discuss together what was to be "done next."

Jules, repentant and forgiven, was now allowed to slip out and refresh himself with a stiff peg. The male element did not enter into the subsequent proceedings. Our business was to vanish utterly away. We preferred it so, for we did not wish to gloat upon our victim in her hour of trial. We were sorry, very sorry for her now that it was all over. Besides, manlike, having roused the very dickens, we were only too glad to get out of it and leave it to the women to settle.

"My wife," said Monsieur, after a gulp at his peg of whisky, "protests that nothing will satisfy her but that Madame Pitkeathly shall leave here to-morrow. This she says she will do, for she is completely of opinion that her reputation here is worth nothing. The coup seems to have taken her completely by surprise. She cannot even begin to think, and she suspects nothing of that it is—what you call a—a——"

"A plant," someone said.

"Yes, a plant. She makes no excuse but to say that she forgot herself, and is sorry, completement boulversee. Ma foi! She will make no more scandals. This has been a lesson to her!"

The voices rose and fell in the next room.

We had a vision of her there, quite distraught, bewildered; and a vision of her, monstrous and woebegone, flying to catch the earliest train after a night spent in hurried packing; in her distress scattering tips which in calmer moments she'd never have given, and thus losing what was perhaps the greatest pleasure of all to her—namely, the look of disappointment on the faces of the hotel attendants. Flying after a sleepless night, spent in pondering on the strange unwontedness of her position, that she who had hitherto been the foremost amongst those to hound and scent out scandal, should now be a fugitive, the implicated one, and

dissembler of her movements and motives, instead of being the one to harry. Something monstrous and inimical and unforeseen had risen upon her, grappled with her and thrown her down. If she had heard of someone being found in a like position *at that hour*, would she have spared them or failed to think the worst and denounce them? No. Then why should she expect mercy. She would now be the hounded, not the hound; the fugitive, not the pursuer.

Our cigars and cigarettes were puffed at half-heartedly as we discussed the ethics of what we had done. Now that it was done, we were not quite happy over it. I think we did not in retrospect feel it was quite man's work. Our consciences pricked us.

The voices still rose and fell in the next room.

What an illogical thing a conscience is, I thought, wandering off again mentally. It refuses to be educated. Mine I find pricks me when my brain, which has responded to my educational studies, and has become extensively and decidedly logical and capable of seeing things as they are, tells me that I have done right. Yet very often when my brain tells me that I should feel it pricking me I feel nothing. There is no proper co-ordination between the two. Very often I do not know that I have done wrong until my neighbour, labouring under the disadvantage of knowing nothing of my affairs, points out in a voice choking with indignation how badly I have behaved. Why should we, after all, burden ourselves with a conscience at all when our neighbours are always so kind and willing and eager to tell us when we go wrong? It is as unnecessary as an appendix. As a proviso of nature it works out this way—that each man burdens himself with one, allows it to take up his time and sap his energy and in return it only registers the misdeeds of his friends and keeps them on the straight and narrow road. He cannot rely upon it in a crisis at all for himself. It is tantamount to going to the expense of keeping a carriage so that others shall ride in it.

And here were we, linking up all our consciences and setting them to work on Mrs Pitkeathly's behalf, to put her on the straight road to the station.

Again the voices were heard, and again my conscience pricked me. Pooh ! I thought, my brain stringing facts together logically, it was ridiculous that we should feel qualms about Mrs Pitkeathly. She richly deserved all she had got and more, and yet there we were all there, each of us inwardly blaming the other for not having vetoed the thing in its inception. We saw her again before us a stricken creature and we sat silent smoking.

Far from having done her a bad turn we had gone to a lot of trouble to help her. The punishment would develop and sweeten her character. She would brood over it a bit but in time it would do her good. Things had been too much in her favour so far, her soul had become stunted because of her easy niche in life. There is some nourishment in sorrow for people's souls. Those who meet with it increase in mental stature.

Again and again I have noticed that the most delightful person in the world is the Englishman or Englishwoman who has some slight blemish on their character ; who at some time or another succumbed to one of those natural impulses to which all human beings are prone, to step aside from the narrow path just for a moment, and was found out. Not enough of a lapse to blacken, only enough just to breathe a faint tarnish upon. The knowledge of this drawback moves them to exert themselves to please, to make others forget the lapse ; to charm, to bring out the best they have in them, to display and use it. While if it hadn't been for their misfortune their treasures of personality would have lain behind the walls of their national reserve. The people of no other country have such a store of treasures under lock and key.

We might at some future time see what Mrs Pitkeathly could produce.

At that moment came a gentle tapping at the door.

It was Johnson. Come up to see if we were coming down to see the "fun."

We jumped up only too glad of anything that would create a diversion and serve as an anodyne or counter-irritant in the matter of our consciences. It would be a kind action to stay with him and soothe him when the moment came that would prove his calculations incorrect and help him to forget his disappointment when he found that the world was not going incontinently to be destroyed.

He led the way downstairs delighted to have got hold of so many people and to be able to afford them such an exceptional form of entertainment. There would be nothing hackneyed or everyday about it, certainly, and he was in a flutter at the idea of playing the part of host on such a very important and far-reaching occasion; for I think he had almost begun to believe that he was in some way implicated in it and responsible for its passing off without a hitch, just as I had felt about the affair we had lately had in hand. When we were in his room he produced and passed around to us some quite good liqueur (I don't suppose the doctor would have been best pleased if he had known he had the heady stuff there). He only had two glasses and we had to make up the number required with bedroom tumblers and small china mugs with "Souvenir of Lautersimmen" painted on them. We toasted everyone else's and our own future states with ceremony. Soames was more than ever at a loss. I think the events of the whole evening were beginning to appear in the light of a series of bad dreams or nightmares to him and nothing would cause him surprise now. He drank his liqueur very solemnly and toasted very solemnly.

The liqueurs having found good homes, Johnson corked the bottle with a bang from his palm and said, as it would intensify the fun and interest of the occasion if we all had some idea on broad lines of what had

occurred and led up to this catastrophe, he would take us through the figures as carefully as the limited time that lay before us would permit. We soon wouldn't have the use of our brains, so let us do something with them while we still had them. At any moment now we might be burnt to oil rags or dried up like Sahara sand. He hurried us through the resumés of his calculations, sheets and sheets of figures, pointing out with his long bony forefinger, parts worthy of extra attention as ensuring the catastrophe beyond the shadow of a doubt. Monsieur Morton remarked to me in a whisper that they gave evidences of mathematical ability amounting almost to genius.

His theories were extraordinarily convincing. One felt with a slight sinking sensation that nothing but a miscalculation as regards " pi " or a few friendly decimal points stood between us and our doom. If these failed us we were lost.

Mrs Pitkeathly instead of driving at a very early hour along the road to the station would soar away elsewhere in the form of fine dust, intermixed with a cloud of steam. For when the impact with the other world came all rivers, and seas, and vegetation, or other bodies containing juice or moisture would inevitably be vaporised in the ensuant flames.

Perhaps our efforts had all been wasted : it might be that soon she was to be haled before a higher and more dread tribunal than any earthly one.

The moment was now drawing close. It was almost upon us. Johnson tidied away his papers and locked up the remains of the liqueur with a look of pathos and farewell. He then put out the light ; we buttoned our coats up to our necks and stepped out on to the balcony.

Though my eyes have looked long and often on many lovely things, they'd never seen anything to excel what they now rested upon. During the earlier hours of the

night the ermine snow had flung its regal mantle over all; over the measureless pinnacles, the plains, the valley, winding on its way; the villages nestling on the mountain-sides. Everything seemed to wait for God knows what, in a breathless starry silence.

Not for destruction, certainly, or not yet.

With their great grand uplifted outlines and their cold stone strength, the Alps would stand as proxy in the mind for anything that was immortal, enduring, eternal.

The stars gave a cold divine light.

The little lamps in the villages gave a warm human light.

We stood and stood and nothing happened. The air was stilly. It felt almost mild because of its stillness. Our coats were buttoned high and we took in all the aching beauty of that wondrous winter's night.

We forgot the impending calamity. We talked of nature, immortality, destiny. We talked of man and of his insignificance, and asked one another to give reasons for his existing at all. We looked at the planets and wondered what they meant. Were there living creatures on them and did they speculate on our scintillations, as we did on theirs. Mrs Pitkeathly dwindled into nothingness in our minds. We forgot we had punished her or that she had needed punishing.

Fifteen minutes passed. Nothing happened. Half-an-hour passed. Nothing happened. Three-quarters of an hour passed. Nothing happened, except that I noticed that Johnson had slipped off and had laid down on his bed in all his clothes, and was drowning his disappointment in deep slumbers. To-morrow he'd set to work and hound out the fragment of "pi" or the vagrant decimal which had upset his calculations. I gently drew an eiderdown over him and motioned good-night to the others as they made themselves scarce, silently.

I went to the windows to close them, and open the ventilators, and as I did so I threw one last glance outside.

"Thank goodness," I said half aloud, "thank goodness the Swiss can't apply their own sumptuary laws to their own scenery."

THE CRUISE

"It is the most beautiful yacht, about the sixth biggest in the world, and Mr Hitchcock has given me *carte blanche* to ask anyone I like." Thus Celia.

"How soon do we start?" running over in my mind the details of a man's correct yachting kit. Celia springs things on one and tailors hate being hurried. It unnerves them. If the cruise lasted six or seven weeks, judgment would be needed—washing has to be considered. I recollected vaguely that I'd seen yachting men in musical comedy, but otherwise the manners and customs of yachting society were unknown to me. Aunt Anne had a copy of *The Voyage of the "Sunbeam"* in the Chippendale cupboard—the bad period one with the broken arch. I'd read that.

"She's already in commission and we are to start next Thursday week. Lady Pauncefote was to have trotted up her party, but owing to family matters the whole thing has fallen through and I am to provide the people."

"Ah! here's a great chance to work out one of your human chemical combinations. Who are you going to ask? May I ask if you're asking me! You'd not have mentioned it if you hadn't meant to ask me, I think; that would be too like dear Mrs Pitkeathly at the top of her form."

"I wouldn't dream of leaving you behind. There!"

"Can't be trusted, I suppose. Well, maybe you're right. Am I to be taken into your confidence over any of the intrigues afoot, or afloat? What are they to be? Merely personal or something of far-reaching world

import? Are you brewing something that may give the diplomats headaches, and will take them months to unravel?"

"It's nothing personal. It is as you say—a world matter—quite—really—yes—yes," said Celia pensively pulling the ears of a pale peevish pekinese, with an expression on its face like Bismarck after he had torn up a treaty. "Yes, it's a world matter or should be."

I tried hard to get Celia to tell me who or what it was all about or of whom the party would consist. She wouldn't. But she let me know Bulkeley was not coming.

Walking to and from my tailor's in the course of the ten days which intervened before we sailed (I had found the man who held the appointment of tailor to the Royal Yacht Squadron and felt I was in safe hands), I came to some decisions about doing up my chambers, giving my man and his wife a holiday, sending certain things to be cleaned and so on and so forth, with the result that I asked Celia if she would store a piece of fur for me and this she very kindly consented to do. Celia is a great one for storage of furs. She has many fine sets and some sables as black as your hat and do you think she would trust them to one of those storage places? Certainly not. She has her own cedarwood chests and with as many and sundry rites as are needed for the embalming of a mummy she lays her precious furs to sleep all through the long summer days.

And yet I had some misgivings the night before we sailed, when I strolled round to Grosvenor Square with the piece of fur under my arm.

"Good heavens!" said Celia, standing in the middle of a lot of tissue paper and pretty fluffy things and trunks, with her hair very rumpled and wearing a rest-gown. "You never said it was a cat!"

"No more I did, when I come to think of it. Still you *said* you'd store a piece of fur for me, and as you can see, Edward is covered with fur, all over and all

one piece. No joins in it anywhere ! " This is a great point with Celia. The fewer the joins the better the fur, she says.

" I certainly said I'd store a piece of fur for you, but you never said there was anything inside it ! "

I shook my head obstinately. " You said you'd store a piece of fur for me," I said doggedly, and oddly enough, seeing that I was discussing the matter of a cat.

" I never said a cat."

" You never made any stipulations."

" I never thought you'd play such a trick on me."

" That's exactly like a woman, a promise with them never means anything. They always go back on their given word."

It acts like a charm with Celia to accuse her of not keeping her word or to cast animadversions on her sex on this point. Fortunately for me she has one or two little weaknesses on which I can play, or where should I be !

" You *know* I hate cats."

" Yes, I know. That's what I——"

" That's why you said nothing about it, but as I've given my word I must go through with it I suppose."

I patted Edward tenderly and gave his tail a farewell pull and handed him over to Celia's maid to take down to the kitchen. I really do not care much for cats, but I'd lost a very cherished bull terrier and hadn't the heart to put another dog in his place. Besides I used to tell Edward all about him, and his tricks and his doings, and he used to listen, and he filled a blank. One snowy winter's night I'd picked him up, mewing weakly, starving and famished with the cold. I never thought he'd live, but I warmed him and fed him and he didn't die, and the subsequent gratitude and affection he lavished on me gave me—as the French would say—furiously to think, and led me to make comparisons between the behaviour of animals one has

been kind to and the behaviour of human beings one has been kind to, and I drew conclusions greatly to the detriment of the latter. I've done many good turns in my time to my fellows, and have had surprisingly little thanks. Celia having heard all the circumstances, softened greatly towards Edward, and we decided he was a cat with a nice mind. She had him fetched upstairs again and had a good look at him, because, as she remarked, gratitude is such a rare attribute, he must indeed be a remarkable cat.

It may seem rather a poor joke to have played on Celia, but if I'd asked her point-blank to take him she'd have said "No," and doing it this way, I managed the affair. Edward was quite an aristocrat in his own four-footed way. I don't think he'd have liked it if I had left him with just anyone, and his table manners, which were perfect, might have suffered.

The yacht was really a thing of beauty and something to dream of, as she lay by the quayside, a floating edition of a Riviera palace. Dazzling-white, speckless-clean, she gently rode at anchor in the harbour, the Blue Ensign floating at her stern. There were even big banks of flowers placed by the gangway to greet us and cheer us as we arrived, and which of course would be removed before we sailed. She was an object of much attention and admiration as she lay there. Parties were evidently made up by the townsfolk to come down and take a look at her, and gaze wistfully and penetratingly at her sides. Knots of idlers were standing with hands in their pockets and by their absorbed and, in some cases, absorbent-looking faces they were making a quietly violent mental effort to picture to themselves what life must be like for the swells on board such a luxurious vessel. Such of the crew as appeared on deck, swabbing or polishing, or carrying bits of luggage about, also were scrutinised closely, as the strange and interesting myrmidons, who circulated hither and thither, in

obedience to the lightest wish of the diamond-studded multi-millionaire ; obeying instructions to the letter, conveyed to them by the flick of an eyelash or the twitch of an ear ; for surely a man who could own a vessel like this would not have to condescend to talk and utter words, if he wanted a thing done. It would be too much exertion and as likely as not his servants and crew were all trained thought-readers. It was equal to a whole volume of romance out of the free library up in the town. Some of the idlers, to my knowledge, stood there for hours, only stirring to light a fresh fag, or every now and again expectorate into the waters which lay below.

Celia was in good time to act as hostess for Mr Hitchcock and his daughter, and to present the guests as they made their appearance. Hitchcock had indeed left it entirely to Celia. He knew enough about hospitality and entertaining to know that it's as dangerous to mix friends haphazard as it is to mix drinks that way. Americans really do understand that in handling a party of people the component parts must either mingle or remain apart, not combine and explode. He guessed Mrs Carmichael knew what she was doing and he'd leave it all to her.

H'm !

So he stood beside her, leaning over the rails near the gangway, and they chatted intimately and gaily. He was evidently hers entirely to command. I did not resent this. He wasn't young, and I'd taken a fancy to him the moment he shook hands with me and welcomed me aboard his yacht in a few quiet words. He was as fine a specimen as I'd ever seen from the United States ; well set-up and genial, and his fresh kindly face chockful of fat force and good humour. His daughter was a peach—just that—and she and I forgathered on the spot, and whilst waiting for the others she showed me all over the yacht.

How good it smelt. A jolly, cheery, heave-ho my lads smell all up and down everywhere. Perfectly

scrumptious, I thought it. Fresh paint, polished wood with a little saltiness added, and a little smell of fresh plush in the cabins too. I loved it.

Miss Sadie and I laughed and talked unceasingly, and I told her how nice she was and she told me how nice I was. In fact, she went further, and declared she had never met anyone half as nice since the last time she was up at Poughkeepsie. I thanked her and asked her where Poughkeepsie was, and if there were exceptionally nice people there, and she laughed and said most decidedly yes. They beat the band entirely and it was some compliment to be compared to them at all. Then she gave me a lesson in the pronunciation of the word. The county people pronounced it Puff-keepsie, and the common, or if you liked to put it that way, common-sense people pronounced it Pekeesie because it was less trouble. She suggested I should pronounce it with the "Puff" because I was too aristocratic-looking to be really sensible. I caught on to it at once, because I know a town the name of which is also pronounced differently by two different sets of people. The county pronounce the last syllable to rhyme with the first in Pytchley, while the others pronounce it correctly. Whenever we came up the companion-way to see who else had turned up, or to proceed with our sightseeing on another part of the yacht, her appearance created intense excitement among the loungers on the quay.

"See! There she is—that's 'er. There—there—in man's clothes."

And, strictly speaking, this was true, for Miss Sadie was a very boyish figure indeed, in smart riding breeches and a little dark covert coat, cut like a man's dinner-jacket rather. Her soft neck had the whitest and neatest of stocks round it and where this disappeared inside her coat, it was held in place by a long, thin pin, hunting-horn shape, in very yellow unalloyed gold. (Tiffany, says I.) Her little panama hung on her arm by a piece of thick elastic and her hair was

very soft and dark, like spun shadows, and a stray piece had to be tucked in occasionally by a firm white hand, from which a plain dogskin glove had been removed for the purpose. The long shapeliness of her slim knees, encased in skin-tight buckskin, showing above the top-boots, was very agreeable to a cultured masculine eye.

"By Jove, she's not half thoroughbred either!" said I to myself, contradicting an assertion which I had not made to the contrary. Besides the knees, there was a soft creamy skin, and the dark grey eyes like those ripping old darkly brilliant Brazilian diamonds, which seem to have a dusting of darker specks within. Her costume was due to the fact that she had ridden all the way from town, by easy stages, because, as she explained, it would be a long time before she got a chance of any horseback riding, and she felt lost without any exercise.

She was, as I knew, a great amazon, and the news of her exploits had reached this country long before she did, for she captained a ladies' polo team in California which was understood to put up a pretty red-hot game to all comers.

We mutually concluded that the trip was to be great fun. I asked: "Can you tell me who else is coming?" She did not rightly know, but she had vague recollections of hearing her father and Celia discussing it, and it was partly to give a very prominent Cabinet Minister who had lost his voice a real holiday for once, and also, she believed, it had been decided to bring some Labour members along, to widen their point of view and broaden their minds generally, by travel, so there would probably be a sprinkling of them. Celia and Poppa had said this was of paramount importance, and ought to be seen to at once. Poppa said they were always in such a hurry to build Utopias that it would be an admirable thing—she pronounced it with the accent on the second syllable—to let them see what an old game it was and how often it had been tried already

and failed, before Labour members were ever thought of. He'd interviewed the chef and told him to include boiled gammon on the menu, as he had heard they liked it. I said I guessed that gammon of any sort or kind was the last thing they'd stand for and quite right too. But where were we going. Had she any idea? Yes, she had, more or less. She hadn't paid much attention to the discussions, as horses were more in her line than yachts, but she thought we were to wander about the Mediterranean, calling at various ports as we felt inclined, and then do the same in the Ægean and the Ionian seas, visiting Athens and some of the islands beyond. Poppa said the Labour people had never rightly grasped the great political lessons which could be mastered by studying the rise and fall of the different great ancient civilisations. Poppa did not think they gave enough attention to them at all.

"Great Scott!" said I. "Are we to be densely surrounded by wild and rampageous Labour members?"

"Don't ask me," said Miss Sadie. "I can't say how many there are going to be. I rather like them. There's no nonsense about them and they are always interesting, and that's more than can be said for swagger people."

At that moment I drew her attention to an odd sight. We had gone down to the saloon for tea, and from where we stood talking we could just see the top of the companion-way, so that the legs only of people were visible as they went by. Just now we observed that two pairs of legs had paused in earnest conversation, preparatory to descending. We could not hear what the people to whom the legs belonged were saying, but even so we might almost have guessed what the trend of the conversation of the owner of each of them would be. One pair was aggressive and sturdy and domineering-looking. They shot inwards from the hips and then shot outwards from the knees again, supporting their owner strongly and trestle-wise.

"Where have I seen those legs before?" I murmured. The feet planted themselves truculently and decidedly on the top stair. There were bumps on the ends of the boots, and the toes themselves were set wide apart. You could see that nothing short of a charge of dynamite would move that person once he had made up his mind on insufficient premises about anything. "Where have I seen those legs before?" I had it. Of course. John Tenniel's drawings of the British workman when he was in a stubborn mood, or Sullivan's drawings of the plumber who had gone away and left his job half done, when there was a burst pipe in question, flooding the whole house.

I pinched Miss Sadie's arm (nice arm). "Look, look!" I said. "That's one of the Labour members for a ducat. Mark my words, that's one of them."

"Sakes alive, is it?" she said.

But who did the other legs belong to? I looked at them. "Where have I seen those legs before?" They were straight, with a gentle, undecided, or at any rate I'm-open-to-conviction look about them. The grey trousers were faded and wavy in outline and came down concertina-wise, just a shade too much over the gentle wistful feet, encased in round-toed boots of soft and well-used leather. The toes turned slightly inwards, introspectively, pleadingly. They were, take them for all in all, the most conciliatory and kindly-looking legs I'd ever seen. Whoever the owner was, I knew I would like him. Suddenly recollections of various caricatures came into my mind. Caricatures of all sorts and kinds seen in daily papers, or weekly ones, or in clubs hanging on the walls of the smoking-room, or in monthly periodicals lying on dentists' waiting-room tables, to help to pass the moments, which seem so interminably short, before one goes in.

"They seem strangely familiar—where have I—— Great Scott—it can't be—yes, it is—by Jingo, it must be the Prime Minister!!!"

Simultaneously, and at this moment, the pairs of

legs resumed locomotory movements and began to descend the companion-way stairs and we of course went forward to meet them. It was the Prime Minister, no less!

"Great Scott!" I said again, half to myself and half to Miss Sadie, still holding her arm lightly to keep her attention and explaining under my breath who it was. I'd get even with Celia for not telling me beforehand. It was too bad, when I might have had a chance of reading up some political memoirs or old funny stories, or some Parliamentary law books and impressing him. These sort of people are so useful to rising barristers or even to those who don't rise, like myself. I might even have realised who was coming, when Miss Sadie had told me that they were expecting a prominent Cabinet Minister who had lost his voice, for the papers had been ringing with it; but as she only mentioned it ten minutes or so before, it didn't give one much time to sort out a few subjects likely to go down well, or to change or to tone down one's political views so as to fit in with his. One might have done it in a week, but hardly in ten minutes, with decency. It was too bad! Miss Sadie, as an American, was equal to the occasion, and shook hands warmly with them both, explaining who she was, and who I was, and extracting their names from them, and effecting the introductions without turning a hair.

The Prime Minister looked at her with kind puzzled eyes. By the way, have you noticed that most people who try to serve their country get a puzzled look in their eyes in time? But this is irrelevant and not organic. I'm afraid in telling this story I put most things in their wrong sequence and wander away into side issues, but there's rather a lot to tell and it's a bit puzzling to get things in their right places and takes so long to think out, I find. Anyway, he looked at her, and told her in a hoarse whisper he was greatly looking forward to the trip. It was an inspiration to have asked him, and he felt it was an inspiration,

equally, on his part, to have accepted it. Seeing Miss Hitchcock, he felt quite sure of it.

Miss Hitchcock laughed and thanked him prettily. She was by now giving Mr Stalybrass, the Labour member, his tea. For he was, even as I had said, one of them. He seemed inclined to take it seriously and settle down to it quite a good deal, so we three did the talking. The Prime Minister, who would talk a lot, said that, apart from the delightful company he would have, what he thought would please him most about the trip was that he understood there would be great, if not insuperable, difficulties about obtaining newspapers regularly. He hated newspapers above all. They were horrid things and worried him so. They were always asking him why he didn't do something, and when he did do anything they all got cross and slated him for having done it. It was very trying. Do what you will, you could not please them. If they'd only tell you what should be done—that is, of course, something feasible and reasonable—but they always teemed with absurd suggestions. His doctors said this trip was the very thing. He must get away from the newspapers, they said—and he was going to! He put his head on one side and peered round the saloon short-sightedly and as if he thought it looked very nice.

I chipped in, partly to stop him speaking, for I'm sure it was bad for him, and partly to reassure him, saying that after we had been out cruising a while we'd begin to feel quite differently towards the newspapers, and our hearts would ache with sympathy with the Ancient Britons who thought they were lucky if they got their first news of some great battle twenty years after it had been fought, by word of mouth from a wandering minstrel who was likely to alter the details and even assign the victory to the wrong people.

"Ah, ha!" he chuckled and wheezed; "good, very good! By word of mouth from Thamaris of Thrace. He was the last minstrel, you know! Ah,

ha! very good!" He chuckled again and looked at me as if he thought I was a clever fellow, and I felt as if I'd not done so badly, in spite of Celia's not telling me he was coming. There's nothing like an impromptu, after all.

We showed them their respective cabins after tea, and Miss Sadie and I went on deck to see how things were getting on.

There we ran into the arms of Dan.

"Dan, by all that's holy. Why, I thought you . . ."
"You don't mean to say you're here . . ."

We mutually groaned, and shook hands perfunctorily, and then I saw Dan's eyes rove appreciatively over Miss Sadie. Miss Sadie looked at him with some interest, I thought, and it was not surprising. He's an infernally presentable fellow, somehow. I hardly know what there is about him, but it's there right enough.

"Introduce me, Peter, won't you?" he said, with a smirk and his very best manner. I did so.

"Snatcher," I said to myself bitterly, and went off, leaving them together.

I watched some more of the party come down the gangway. It would take me a few days to work out who were guests and who were not, I could see. But I supposed that some of the nice-looking girls who tripped down the gangway, carrying parcels and rugs and things, were maids, or else the female element would preponderate unduly. This could not be, for Celia generally allows two nice men per nice girl. She says it's only just enough.

No, some of these nice girls were dear little ladies' maids, and some of these stalwart fellows were gentlemen's gentlemen. The cruise would not be lacking in romance, either before or behind the mast, I decided. I saw Vanda's car come down the quay and disgorge a vast quantity of luggage and band-boxes. If she

had taken Celia's advice to heart and given away her nice things, she had evidently not forgotten to buy others. Nevertheless she was much changed for the better. Celia had done wonders, and Vanda only flirted strictly within reason these days.

I ran up to her and assisted her to get everything out.

"Have you seen him?" she said in some excitement.

"Rather!" I replied, thinking she meant the P.M.

"What's he like?"

"Oh, a *dear* old chap."

"Old? He's not a day over twenty-five."

I shook my head. "You can't mean the same person I mean."

"I mean Prince Athanasios Radovitchka," naming a little homeless princeling. His father had been deposed, and he was now waiting peacefully and contentedly in England till a counter-revolution should put his family on the throne again. His full name was Demetrius Athanasios Appolonia Ostrovitzka Radovitchka.

"Well, we've lots of big pots on board anyway, but I'm glad to see you and Dan; for, barring you two, I don't seem to know any of the rest."

"But Miss Macinerney is coming, and so are Diana and Mr Vansittart. I left them in the town trying to get some mauve ribbon. Who's that nice-looking girl over there? I've not seen her before. She's new—she's nice."

"Don't know"—and I looked over my shoulder at her. "Don't know. She's brand-new to me. But let's try and make out how many we are, as far as we know." With the aid of my ten fingers and borrowing a few of Miss Vanda's (I pinched the tips of them, "this-little-piggy-goes-to-market-wise," while she giggled), we made out that we would be fourteen or fifteen all told. It would be a strange mixture, a regular bizarre Celia blend. A deposed prince, a

Prime Minister minus his voice, various Labour members, a sprinkling of Society women——

"What we'll have to have is tact," I observed pregnantly, "and then everything may be all right."

As I don't believe in wasting a sensible remark by only using it once, I repeated this one to the P.M. By the way, he seemed to have taken quite a liking to me. It may have been my sympathy about the newspapers, or what I'd said about the wandering minstrel, but he seemed to seek out my companionship from the very first. So during the course of the evening I repeated it to him, whilst the blue wreaths of cigar smoke were curling upwards and we half sat, half lay upon the saloon cushions. To my surprise, for he seemed such a mild man, he turned an eye that glittered with sudden fever upon me, and begged me not to use the word again. He'd come away to try to forget that word tact—and the newspapers of course too—but he wished he'd never heard the word tact—let's see—he didn't know what the exact derivation was—*tactus—tangere*—to touch, yes, that was it, but for years all his waking hours had been spent in the exercising of tact, tact, tact. Tact with the extreme members of his party, tact with the moderate members of his party, tact with the landowners, tact with the bishops, tact with the brewers and farmers, tact here and tact there, to say nothing of the tact he had to exercise in his own household. He had a big family and a wife of course (I remembered having heard that he was somewhat over-wifed) and family life bristled with difficulties these days. He became a bundle of nerves when anyone mentioned it now.

"My dear boy, as a favour, let me beg of you never to use that word again in my hearing!"

I promised and he resumed.

The members of his party were always imploring him to have tact with some body of people or another. Saying he must be careful not to tread upon their corns. This was a favourite remark, often on the lips of

ministers—and certainly it seemed to him that whatever one did or did not do, one trod on somebody's corns. Every man in the street seemed to have corns which must not be trodden on. Every time a decent piece of legislation was proposed that he wanted to support, he was told that if he did so he would be treading on somebody's corns, and so it had to be shelved because of these aforesaid corns, and the idea obsessed him finally. He couldn't sleep because of them, or when he did, he had awful nightmares. And constantly, at the back of his mind, this dreadful idea surged, and constantly he saw before him this army of feet, the feet of the multitude, and they were all garnished all over with these unnecessary protuberances, which must *on no account be trodden on.*

He said this sea voyage was an inspiration. Really it was an inspiration. (This is an awful word to say under your breath when you have lost your voice. Try it.) He was getting away for a bit from that horrid word *and* the newspapers *and* the corns. It was the first decent holiday he would have had for years. But as there seemed to be a slight lull in the country's manifest and usual desire to go to the dogs, and as his doctor said he'd have a complete and permanent breakdown quite soon, and lose his voice for good, unless he had one, he had seized the opportunity ; and Mr Hitchcock's invitation transmitted to him via Mrs Carmichael had come just at the right moment.

His secretary wanted to come too, but he said " No " —once and for all " No "—he felt he must get away from everything, and the stop-gaps must deal with all the corns and all the newspapers and supply all the T—— needed (I knew what he meant—he wouldn't mention the word). If anything very desperate occurred, they could, of course, bring him back by wireless, and no doubt he'd be met by the first instalment of corns which must not be trodden on at Dover on his return. This trip would cost him nothing and

for a Prime Minister to get an inexpensive holiday was a very great matter. His official income sounded all very well and the populace were always raising an outcry about it, but it was, of course, absurdly inadequate. He was supposed to wallow in luxury on his ill-gotten gains, but by the time he had subscribed to all the charities he was expected to subscribe to, and paid big election expenses, paid for a bun, when he hadn't time to lunch—which was frequently—and educated and clothed and fed his children, paid and fed enough servants to dust the rooms of his official residence and to answer the door to callers upon him in his official capacity, and paid for stamps and telegrams, and wedding presents that had to be given in his official capacity, aye—and paper and string to wrap 'em up in ; and given a few light luncheons and heavy dinners to distinguished visitors from abroad, to try and smooth things over between different countries, and taxis to get to official entertainments elsewhere ; why, he had barely enough to keep himself and his family in semi-genteel poverty. At the moment he very badly wanted some thick undervests for winter wear, but unless someone gave them to him as a birthday present he'd simply have to go without them. One comfort of not seeing the papers was that for a short time he would not see any more of those indignant letters in them, in which indignant people asked to know what he did with the vast sums of money he wrung from an impoverished country and wanting to know if he really worked sufficiently hard to warrant the drawing of such a salary.

We both went into shouts of laughter here ; that is, I laughed, and he gasped and wheezed. " Of course, my dear boy—I could never do it unless I had private means of my own. Why, the stamps alone "—and he gave an expressive shrug to his shoulders. " No, the boot is on the other leg, quite. But I can hardly bring myself to explain to them that they are in my debt, heavily, and not I in theirs ! "

I assented.

"Yes, my dear boy, that's the worst of the Democracy. They deal in millions and they think in farthings."

From that he wandered on in the most far-reaching way, on to the joys (*sic*) and sorrows of the position he held. He made no mysteries and talked quite naturally and frankly. He sketched his career for me briefly and told me many interesting things about his work, giving me some insight into the responsibilities of such a position. I felt as if I had been allowed a glimpse over a precipice, and almost turned giddy. One could never tell the truth—that was too dangerous—and it was a real deprivation to him—but one so to speak moulded it—squeezed it a little bit here, and perhaps a little bit there. If one didn't do it, why, the others did, and didn't do it so well. One had to be pragmatical, of course. It was a trial, though, to him to have to do it. As a young man, like many public men before him, he'd had a lot of fine illusions. He wanted to do great noble things, things to help the world along, to lighten the burden of others. Almost at times he'd felt as if he heard voices calling, as Joan of Arc said she did. Of course it was all nonsense, but he did hear a sort of inward voice, his conscience, he supposed, calling on him to arise, and buckle on his sword and challenge the legions of evil, the Jabberwocks and Bandersnatches that prevented the world from going forward. He pictured himself wielding the sword, snickersnack, and all that sort of thing. And then one by one the illusions fell away and perished miserably, and he suddenly saw everything as it was, so drab, so utterly drab. But he found himself left with a certain amount of practical cold-blooded common-sense and a determination to do something to help things along. And then he did that something—something which he had pondered on and thought much upon, and which to him seemed to be a very good thing, and then found everyone against him,

even his best friends, for politics are as a canker that will come upon and blight the finest friendships. And worst of all—and which as likely as not happened—the thing he'd done, instead of producing the effect he expected, shot off at a tangent and produced entirely different results and one felt inclined to tear one's hair out. He paused for a moment, and knocked the ash off his cigar. I looked sideways at his kindly old face. What appalling responsibilities had gone to model it into its present expression of philosophical and utterly understanding resignation. It was now the face of a man who expected nothing of anything but who gently refused to be depressed or disquieted by the fact. The thought of what he had been speaking of held him, for he went on to say, shrugging his shoulders in mock despair, that one repeated the "if at first you don't succeed" motto to oneself and tried again, and perhaps luck would go against one and things go wrong again, and presently one's nerve began to fail one and one wondered if one could trust to one's own opinions, even in the smallest matters. Even with all his years of experience at his back, doubts assailed him as to his perspicacity and powers of judgment. Really knowledge unnerves a man, in a sphere so vast as that of government of peoples. He often wondered if the wisest thing of all would not be to withdraw and leave all to the fools. Ignorance was a great force and there was very little way of knowing what would be the best thing to do under any given set of circumstances, or, having once set a thing in motion, foresee in what direction it would walk off with itself. Mind you, it was amusing and fascinating too. There were all the elements of a gamble about it. Perhaps the greatest fun, and the thing that called for more skill in handling, and acuteness of vision, was the dodge that had to be resorted to, when one wished to get a particular piece of legislation through that—as far as you could see—would turn out for the benefit of the country. One never pretended or let on, as they say in Ireland, or let

the least hint leak out as to what was being set about. Oh dear, no ! One drew a great whacking red herring across the path, usually a Church question of sorts, and when everyone was bickering wildly about the width of a chasuble's hem, and no one was watching—hey, presto ! the other thing was done. That was certainly most amusing. He could cite me instances, etc., etc., etc.

But I headed him off. I certainly would never mention the word to him again. If I had known how it would have started him off, I'd have avoided it as the plague. Why, his vocal chords would never get right again, if he allowed himself to hold forth like this ! I took it on myself to warn the others not to encourage him, no matter how interesting he was.

It was in the early hours of the morning that our gallant white vessel weighed her anchor and set quietly forth on summer-like seas. I had noticed the day before a pile of new books on the smoke-room table, and glancing at them, found that they were mostly short and shorter histories of Greece, short and shorter histories of Greek civilisations. Short and shorter histories of the Peloponnesian wars, guide-books on the manners and customs of the Greeks from 600 B.C. to A.D. 120. Many volumes of translations of Greek poetry and plays, and some in the original text, left for the very learned. I picked out a copy each of the Iliad and the Odyssey, and unearthed too a complete edition of Byron. When we left the harbour, as I say, the water was as calm as a mill pool and our first few days on board were wildly enjoyable and quite novel. We beat it out to sea at a good pace, for when we got upon deck, the first morning, there were no signs of land anywhere. Toward evening we were over against the Caskets, *en route* for the Bay of Biscay and the Straits of Gibraltar. At first all went moderately well, and meals were served and attended with regularity by most of us ; but when we were nearing Ushant a slight " lipper " appeared on the surface of the water, and as

soon as the yacht's nose found its way into the Bay of Biscay it was seen that we were in for a good blanketing. Through some agency, not clear to the landsman, some combination of air currents and water currents, I believe—speaking in complete ignorance and leaving myself open to correction—no matter how calm it may be in other bays, or how mildly the winds whisper elsewhere, there it is the exception to have a quiet time, and the rule to get a regular tossing. It blew something like half-a-gale, and I think at times it was said we shipped the water green. At all events, it drove the ladies down below, all except Celia, who doesn't care two straws how rough the weather may be. If the vessel she was on stood on its head, it wouldn't make any difference to her. She hung on to the rigging, with the rain and the spray trickling down her oilskins, and the wind blowing her hair down into her eyes. She laughed and enjoyed it to the utmost. Dan was as little affected as she, and I'm hardened to it also. Our family place is by the sea and I'd spent many a long day out with the fisher-folk. Hitchcock was knocked out, but Stalybrass was all right. He'd been a marine for some time, as I afterwards learnt. I saw at a glance how useful his sort of legs would be at sea. No matter how much a vessel pitched, or what a slant her deck took, his trestle legs would bear him up when other folks' would be useless. One or two of the other men stayed up part of the time, but were not sociably inclined, and I do not think that Dan endeared himself to them by buttonholing them and explaining that we were finite particles of infinite matter, floating in waves of ether, and that if only we could fix this firmly in our minds and thereby realise our relative unimportance in the scheme of things entire, we would never have the effrontery to be sea-sick again for it would seem presumptuous. He said that was his cure and that sea-sickness was only another form of vanity and conceit.

I said meaningly: "How is it then that a great

many people are not sea-sick on dry land ? " and walked off, before he could answer me.

Off and on, we had bad weather all the way to Gibraltar and it was not till we were approaching the Balearic Isles that the sea grew calm, and the winds withdrew to their mountain caverns. There the sun quickly pushed the clouds away and treated us to a mild heat-wave, and lo and behold ! we were steaming through a merry, sparkling sea, with little languid breezes, which could scarcely find a way through our port-holes to cool our cabins. In a very short time they had wooed the ladies upstairs, and though a little *piano* from the recent tossing, they were soon themselves again, making merry up and down the deck, in their pretty fluttering muslins and airy laces.

For the first time, the party assembled in its entirety, and any of us new to one another took stock of each other. Nancy was the name of the fair unknown I'd pointed out to Vanda. She was elegant and bonny, and there was a lot of laughter about her. When Celia led her up to us and Diana too, I could see that the mere males (unpicturesque in comparison) were deciding rapidly that everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Diana really looked magnificent. Her pale copper-coloured hair was wound round and round her head, and up and up, and it looked like the burnished helmet of a Minerva.

" She's a bully girl," said Miss Sadie at my elbow. " And can't she do her hair, just ! "

From now on there were many pleasing little excitements each day. Starting with the morning, the early bird would be found careering up and down the deck in a fur coat, thrown over a pair of palest mauve pyjamas and with mauve hair ribbons, by the early worm, its hair a bit ruffled by its bath and wearing, maybe, a dark Parma violet bath-robe. The early worm sometimes lent its splendid big sponge (man's size) or loofah, or generously gave a handful of its best bath crystals away.

"Oh, thank you, Mr Blenerhassett, or Mr Vansittart, or Mr de Courcy" (it might be any of these three), "won't you try this soap of Morny's? It lathers beautifully in the salt water."

Sometimes quite a lot of early birds and early worms exchanged soaps, crystals or pert nonsense, whilst some of the crew looked on, out of the corners of sympathetic sea-blue eyes, or exchanged cryptic remarks *sotto voce* with one another. Something that sounded like "she's a dog-gone dangerous girl," with a lot of emphasis on the words dog-gone.

When the P.M. ambled up one morning, having heard that it was quite the thing to do, and in a measure the equivalent of a canter in the Row before breakfast, and was seen to accept the loan of someone's patent water-softener, a manly voice was heard high up in the rigging singing tunefully:

"He *may* be old, but he's got *young* ideas!"

By the time we were within hail of Marseilles' rocky shores, the general characteristics of all the members of the party had to some extent revealed themselves. Our host was beloved of all, for he was simply overflowing with hospitality and kindly geniality. The little foreign prince, momentarily or permanently deposed (who could tell?), showed himself to be agreeable and natural, and put on no frills, and had an amazing inclination to run everybody's messages, pick up fallen books or wraps, or offer cigarettes or lights to everyone. He was also very good at remembering dates. As the trip went on, we found this most useful, when we were struggling to piece together all the information we were getting up, and confounding periods, and making people contemporaries when they were hundreds of years apart. He saved us many a headache. If I had any fault to find with him, it was that his clothes fitted him a shade too well and too closely, but he was very well educated—as such people usually are—and his manners were perfect. That the ladies

were all delightful goes without saying, and the P.M., to use their own expression, was "too sweet for words!"

Miss Sadie's verdict was, that she had no doubt whatever but that he would be received with open arms by the best set in Poughkeepsie. I saw then that there must be some subtle American joke attached to this apparently simple phrase, and felt that I must get to the bottom of it as soon as possible.

The two Labour members were very interesting. I think I said before that there were two on board. The owner of the legs really was a blatant fellow, though of course he was very able and probably had lots of good in him in many ways. Though I am anticipating in saying it here, it must be said in his favour that he showed himself open to improvement, and as the trip went on, we persuaded him to give house-room to the idea that he did not know everything that was to be known about everything. At first we did not like him at all. His voice leapt from his throat. He contradicted everyone and looked about him intolerantly, and always seemed to be trying conclusions with everybody and everything; the fittings of the yacht, the crew, or whatever book he happened to be reading, or anything anyone said. We had many discussions with him, for he invited them. I used sometimes to sit silent, and listen to his voice, harsh and unpleasant in comparison to the others. What was the difference, I asked myself, between a cultured voice and one that was not cultured? The former flowed easily along, almost melodiously, certainly pleasantly; all the harshness trained out of it; but the latter was full of provincial inflections; full of jars and pullings up; sudden onslaughts and interruptions in the flow of sound; syncopation, it is called in music. I decided, listening to him, that the fellow spoke in rag-time, which is syncopated. Nearly all provincials speak in rag-time, that is what it came to.

His manner to the prince was a study. He was sometimes rude and sometimes cringing, but never

seemed to get into a middle gear. He presented the same anachronism as the English railway companies who run first- and third-class carriages, but no seconds. He had denounced princes and noble ones so often and had told himself and others that he despised them and would have no truck with them—as they were tyrants and bloodsuckers—that he was all at odds in his intercourse with the little chap. And yet he was pleased and gratified at hobnobbing with him and no doubt wished his friends could see him offering and accepting a light, "just as casual and as off-hand as you please." But though he'd make excuses to get near him, anyone with any powers of observation could see that he was frightfully in awe of him, and that in the face of the little princeling's urbane incapacity, and elegant uselessness, he felt frightfully conscious of it and ashamed of all the little and big sordid useful things he knew and could do, and of all the little sordid and useful people he came from and with whom he was really more at his ease. The pathetic part of it was, that he was really the better man of the two—of more use to the community. But though he knew it inwardly and was never tired of asserting it to himself and to everyone else, still it was apparent that he couldn't feel it when he found himself near him. It was a minor tragedy. If he hadn't despised the prince so frightfully on account of his being a prince, he wouldn't have felt so badly in his presence. The explanation being, that it was the inevitable reaction. People should be careful how they despise things, lest their despising recoil upon themselves.

Celia's manner to Stalybrass was also a study. She was amiability itself to him. Why not, as he was there through her invitation. But it was that eager double-dose sort of amiability one uses, because it's got to persuade two people of its existence. The sort of amiability one pumps up, when one wants to like a person or an inferior, and one wants them to believe one likes them, and indeed one would like to like them if one

could, but really one is not so sure about it, and one is frightfully afraid that it is apparent that one doesn't like them much as one would like to like them—and good heavens—yes—one can see by the look in their eyes that they know one's amiability is only a pretence after all ! She worked hard and kept it up wonderfully, but sometimes she looked pale and tired.

Stalybrass amused me, because though we passed through some of the loveliest scenery in the world, he seemed to make a point of sitting with his back to the view, whenever he could. I fancy he thought our enthusiasm was " soft " ! We soon routed him out at such times, and made him get up and struggle with his chair, which, as it was a deck-chair, was complicated and collapsible and pinched his fingers and barked his shins and was troublesome to get into the correct notch. The ladies were in possession of all the substantial wicker ones, luckily. When anyone called his attention to the view, he'd turn round abruptly and look at it, as much as to say, that if he had been sitting on the committee that settled these things, he'd have seen to it that that sort of thing wasn't strewn about broadcast. Why, man, it wasn't practical. Those rocks were all very well in their way no doubt, but what sort of a crop of potatoes, or wheat for that matter, could be raised on rubbish like that !

There are some things that infuriate one so much that one enjoys them. His attitude affected me in this way. He roused a distinct spirit of antagonism in everyone, I think. He found a good deal to say about the idle rich, and our host would take him on over this. There was no law against any man becoming rich or at any rate moderately successful, he said. If he minded his own business and kept his eyes peeled for opportunities, there was nothing to stop him getting on. Why, in comparison to the working man, the rich man, apart from his work, worked harder at his games and pleasures in one year than many a workman did in ten years at his regular job, and who meantime had little

or no responsibility, which, of course, was the hardest work of all. If only the demagogues and tub-thumpers would teach the people that instead of hating the well-to-do, they could get up amongst them, if they really tried, they'd be doing good instead of harm—he spoke as a self-made man. Why, it was a simple prapasition that one man's prasperity begat the prasperity of the other man, and it was a pity that people did not understand that simple fact. He conceded that the wives of workmen had to work very hard, and that in times of national crisis the men themselves did wonders too.

The P.M. got at Stalybrass over the Trade Union hours. You could make people's hands and feet conform to an eight hours' bill, but what about a man's brain. The brain had a way of running along on its own lines, once it had started upon a subject, and the subconscious mind was on the alert, and would even carry on the work while a man slept. He reckoned he had done sixteen hours' brain-work a day, not counting subconscious work, for thirty-five years, and expected to go on doing so for a long time yet.

I'm afraid we all chaffed Stalybrass a good bit, partly because he rose instantaneously to almost any bait, and partly because when anything excited him his face got purple and his neck and jaws used to swell up, and so much that even his cheeks and ears used to become larger. Apoplexy would claim him for its own some day. Meantime, I'm sorry to say that we kept on getting rises out of him, just for the fun of seeing his neck and jaws puff up and go down again, sometimes, with luck, several times in rapid succession.

"Poor dear Stalybrass," the P.M. used to say gently, "it's very wrong to pull his leg. I'm afraid I'm an awful sinner. But he is so appallingly downright, so absolutely uncompromising and dogmatic. And yet they tell me that he has a much larger following in his party than Rankin. What a pity! But it's likely, though, I suppose, that they'd prefer a tub-thumper who

roars nonsense at them. But what a charming fellow Rankin is. He's one of the very nicest men I've ever met."

That's exactly how I felt about Rankin (he was the other Labour member). I also felt that he was one of the very nicest men I had ever met. He'd conquered everyone on board the yacht. In appearance he was delightful, bore himself well, and had a good head, with a fine amount of crisp iron-grey hair. The amount of simple goodness in that man's face was past computing. He'd seen trouble too, for it was written there, and the lines of grief and the lines of fun met and crossed one another in it, and produced the most attractive and humorous, and yet quaintly sad expression imaginable. There was always a quiet smile on his lips, and it went straight to one's heart.

He was always gentle and conciliatory and innocently pleased with all he saw. By Jove! I was glad that Celia had got him to come, and that we were going to see such wonderful things. He'd read everything and remembered most of what he read, and had his own commentaries to make on it all; balanced, shrewd, kindly. It was a privilege to talk to him. I never ceased congratulating myself that we had brought him along with us on that trip.

We anchored one night at Marseilles and next day got off the yacht in some excitement at the idea of being on dry land once more. The yacht was berthed at the very far end of one of the longest piers, so that it was quite a walk thence to the town, but we didn't quarrel with that, as it was really a relief to stretch our legs. We got off, with the ladies, a merry crowd of chattering, perfumed femininity, perfectly dressed by Jenny and Lanvin or Jean Hallée, all of Paris, accompanied by a squad of attendant swains, who distributed themselves discreetly, full of those agreeable little obligingnesses, which make things so pleasant all round; carrying capes and books or parasols and explaining things gladly, if questions were put to them,

instead of answering in monosyllables or grunting. One could see by the angles at which these aforesaid swains, both young and elderly, or should I say elderly and young, had put on their hats that they were acutely conscious, in every fibre, of the superior charms and incontestable elegance of the fair ones they accompanied.

There is much that is subtle in the adjustment of a hat, be it a collapsible panama which can be rolled up with the tooth paste and sponges, or the hard boating straw, or the ordinary American wideawake of commerce.

Suffice it to say that the only hat which showed no symptoms of emotion was Stalybrass's. He merely put his hat on to keep his head warm or cool, according to the weather.

The amount of expression the P.M. got out of the way he clapped his sedate old felt Homburg on was amazing. There was a world of innocent rakishness about it. It was a good thing that he was no longer, for the moment, at the head of his country's affairs, for had he not been on a holiday, the scandal of that angle would have flashed far and wide across all the continents immediately, by wire, letter or word of mouth. There would have been a terrible to-do, which might have resulted in a split in the party, one lot refusing to follow a leader who could be capable of putting on his hat so, the other lot maintaining that there was no harm in it, and that it need not affect his political purity. For the Great British public, whatever they do themselves, and that they do it, I'm pretty sure, are quick to resent any moral backsliding on the part of their representatives, and will tolerate no frivolity of demeanour in them whatsoever. Anything might have happened as I say, and the least, the passing of a vote of censure, and a resolution of "no confidence" carried *nem. con.*

The warming-up of the landscape observable to any traveller along that southern coast of France just

about sets in at Marseilles. As yet there is no blaze of colour, but over all there is a sun-warmed look, and evidence on rock and stone and house, and native face, of ardent rays, supported through the long tale of summers. It is perhaps rather a discoloration than a coloration. There's a sober warmth about the conglomeration of sharp crags and hills, all of a brackenish-brown shade, and over which the brownish town straggles, zigzag all the way up.

Some vegetation about, here and there, but not too luxuriant. It's too busy a place to have much room for it, for it's spreading and getting built over to right and left, on the various heights and towards the shores. I remember the harbour seemed very full and very crowded as we walked all its long length on an almost interminable pier of apparently new masonry. The whole place gave one the idea of a perfect tangle of industry that had increased rapidly and was about to increase still more rapidly. It looked to me like a place where the day would never be long enough for all there was to do in it, and where everyone went to bed every night saying with a shrug " Can't be helped. I must leave this work till to-morrow; the hour is too late."

In the streets the voitures and charettes jostled one another over the rough paved streets and though there may not have been quite so much noise or quite so much tinkling of harness bells as in an Italian town, still it was not far behind. The carters and the inhabitants (or cousins who were visiting from other provincial towns) called loudly to one another. One noticed that just as the landscape had warmed up in these parts, so had the voices (and the eyes). The neighbours shouted from open doorways particular and minute inquiries as to the health of a friend across the road, and he gave them minutely, or she, and then asked for minute particulars in return about the first person's health. The rumbling vehicles were urged up the steep streets with vociferations and cracks of

whips: "Eh! La bas! Qu'est'ce que tu fais la? Sacré nom d'un chien!" And three sturdy, blue-bloused ruffians would dispute the right of way, when each was on his wrong side.

The view from the upper town is magnificent. Down below, riding at ease in the harbour, lay the yacht. We were not sorry to get down to her cool awnings and saloons, as the day was furiously hot. Beyond the view and the quaintness of the town itself there was little to see. The Cannebière was empty, deserted by the tricky little Marseillaises, who preferred the shade of their houses till evening should subdue its dusty glare.

Monaco saw us next. To most of us, the little principality, that looked like a bouquet floating in a sea of liquid, dazzling jade, was familiar. Carnival was drawing to a close, as Easter fell late that year, so it was not looking its best. Many of its white pleasure palaces were closed, and there were noisy crowds in the streets. Fortunately, at Monte Carlo one never gets those terrible painted plaster giants with which they make Nice hideous for so long during the season. Here was nothing more unsightly than a motor car on exhibition in the gardens in front of the Casino, which was to be drawn for. We came in for a battle of flowers, and drove backwards and forwards along the road to Cap Martin, hurling bunches of narcissi, carnations, or Parma violets at every smiling face we saw, right and left. The heat brought out the smell of the crushed flowers and on all sides was the scent of the mimosa-trees. It was a perfect day.

That evening, when I came on board with a false nose on and blowing a long paper thing, that shot out about two yards, Dan offered me a cigarette—a most unusual thing for him to do—he usually borrowed mine—and asked if he might confide in me. I said, "Fire away." He said he didn't want to spoil my pleasure, but mum's the word—Hitchcock and his skipper were having words.

"What about?" I asked, feeling my pink and mauve nose, and flapping the elastic.

Dan didn't know exactly, something about the trip, he fancied.

"How did you hear about it?"

The P.M.'s man had told him. He was a very decent fellow, not a bit the usual smug gossip in a blue serge suit, but the sort of chap that one might very well listen to, if he did say anything. He'd come in very unobtrusively and kindly, several times, and straightened up some of Dan's things in his cabin, that were lying about.

"And read some of your letters, I suppose?"

Dan hadn't had any letters since he left home, so it couldn't be that. No, there must be something in it, or Paxman would never have bothered to repeat it. It would be an awful nuisance if anything did go wrong, as we were all having an absolutely top-hole time. Miss Sadie was charming. He didn't think he'd ever enjoyed himself so much.

I blew the red paper thing out thoughtfully, once or twice.

I agreed it would be a nuisance, a most unmitigated nuisance, if anything went wrong, and I supposed if Hitchcock and the skipper were at loggerheads, things might very conceivably do so. However, there was no use in meeting trouble half-way. Paxman and all his class always exaggerated things and made mountains out of mole-hills. I'd keep my eyes peeled and if I saw anything I'd tell Dan, and he could let me know if he heard anything.

We loafed about Monte for just over a week, motoring, playing sometimes at the tables, hearing some of the operas which were given at the little theatre of the Casino, and listening to the wild music of the Tzigane band. We also lunched largely at Ciro's and at the Hotel de Paris. Hitchcock entertained a good deal, both on the yacht and on the shore, for the first three or four days, and then suddenly grew pensive and played a good deal.

I don't know whether he won or lost, and anyhow it wouldn't matter to him which way it was.

The morning of the day we were due to leave again, Dan came to me and said there was no doubt about it but that relations were strained—very strained—between Hitchcock and his skipper. He was standing close to the chart-room, quite by chance, and he heard the two of them having a most fearful row, swearing at one another in the most sulphuric way, ding-dong, hammer and tongs.

He wondered himself whether the skipper drank, and if so, he wondered if it would be more dangerous to be navigated by a drunken skipper on the high seas than to be driven by a drunken chauffeur across country in the dark. He'd had experience of the latter and it was not at all a nice feeling. He didn't want to eavesdrop outside the chart-room, but couldn't help hearing. They never attempted to lower their voices. Luckily no one else was within hearing, especially none of the ladies. Just as he was making himself scarce, Hitch and the first mate came out. Hitch was purple in the face and the first mate looked pale and worried. They'd seen him and must have guessed he'd overheard, but didn't break into confidences, so he said nothing. Perhaps I had noticed that Hitchcock had been distrait and moony and off his food ? (I had, now that I came to think of it ; he had started off by entertaining all our friends and his friends, and had been the life and soul of the party, and suddenly, for these three days, become very quiet, and spent a good part of the time, when the others were ashore, on the yacht all alone.) I told Dan I had noticed it, and Dan said he was at that very moment mooning in the cabin—smoking a cigar, and wrapped in an impenetrable and glum silence, and didn't seem a bit himself.

I proffered the suggestion that his mood might not be really due to the skipper. Perhaps they had rows regularly. Perhaps it was the usual thing. My mother used to have rows with some of her most

faithful retainers, and they went for one another like anything, but it meant nothing. It might again be due to biliousness on the part of Silas J., brought on by too much rich food, and too little exercise, and that when he felt bilious he always blew people up, and then felt sorry and mooned.

Dan shook his head. He said it was a very real row, or else he was very much mistaken. And he thought the dear old chap was worrying about something and that we'd better find out, and see if there was anything we could do to help him. Even telling us about it might be a relief, instead of bottling it all up, whatever it was. It was a genuine row, and old Hitch would understand if we asked him about it, that we were not actuated by mere vulgar curiosity. If he didn't cheer up soon, he thought we'd better ask him.

He didn't cheer up, but on the contrary, he got glummer and glummer, so at last we broached the subject tactfully, and instead of jumping down our throats, he seemed very relieved, and after asking us to promise not to let any of the ladies hear, or the P.M., for fear of spoiling his holiday, he told us. We swore honest injun we'd say nothing to anybody.

"The fact is, I'm afraid there is something very much the matter with my skipper. I'm astounded at him. I simply can't make it out. I've had him for years, and he's a man of the highest standing at his job, but he simply seems to have lost his head these last few days."

This was indeed a large cloud to rise up and loom over the prospect of the pleasure cruise. Dan and I felt chapfallen.

"Yes, sir! I had the very best credentials with that man; he sailed old Hiram Boon's yacht, the *Semiramis*, all over the place for years, and they absolutely cruised in every sea under the sun that had been charted, and some that hadn't. I've had him now for nearly four years and the yacht's been in commission on and off, nearly the whole time, and we've never had a word, till the other day——"

We said "Tut-tut, tut!" and felt it too. What on earth could the matter be?

"Well, gentlemen! I simply think he's suffering from a bad attack of insubordination, and all the worse, for being so unexpected. Everything was going all right, till I told him I'd altered my original plans as to the course the yacht should take, and instead of going straight to Athens from Messina, go to Corfu instead, first. It is a charming spot, and Vansittart expects important papers there. Why, you'll hardly believe me when I tell you—I can hardly believe it now myself—he actually said I'd no business to change my plans once they were made!!!"

"Well, of all the —— !!!"

"Yes, exactly. That's just what I said to him, and more too."

Hitchcock's jolly old face grew so red that in comparison it made his white clothes so dazzlingly white that we could hardly let our eyes rest on them. "Yes, I told him that might do for the people up at Poughkeepsie, but it wouldn't do for me. I asked him if he took me for the Colonel of the 44th Regiment at a Mothers' Bazaar. And, moreover, I said I'd change my plans every minute of the day if I wanted to. It was my business, just as, if I gave him an order, it was his business to carry it out and not to stand there and have the durned cheek to tell me that I had no business to change my plans. By the Hully Gee! as I told him, if I'd never changed my plans after I'd made them I'd be a poor man to this day, and that's a stern fact, sir! Yep!"

We suggested, helplessly, that he'd had bad news from home. Perhaps some of his children were not well or something of that sort.

"Why, he's got no home in a sense. That is, he's not a married man. No, that certainly might have been a reason, but as the circumstances are otherwise, it can't possibly be that."

I said I thought it was certainly a rum go, a very

rum go. Here was a chap who had an excellent record ; who had shown himself an admirable and a trustworthy servant to Hiram Boon, for a number of years, sailing his yacht everywhere, without any accidents, and who had for the past four years given our host every satisfaction, suddenly turning round and becoming unmanageable. There must be *something* to account for the sudden and unprecedented lapse. Otherwise it was inexplicable and absurd. Had he a good digestion ?

" He's the digestion of a horse—at any rate, he very often boasts of it, and never by any chance needs a doctor. But, of course, he may not be as strong as he thinks he is—few of us are—and the bad digestion would account for the bad dreams he has been having too."

" Bad dreams. Has he been having bad dreams ? Did he complain of them ? "

" Yes, ever since he left Marseilles. I forgot to mention them, as I didn't think it important. I passed him the usual good-morning one day and asked him in the ordinary way how he was, and he told me this. He didn't look well either."

" It's a sure sign he is not as well as he might be, but does he usually have bad dreams ? Some people do."

Hitchcock said, " If so, I've never heard of it. But they must have been pretty bad, as some of his mates heard him calling out, and went and found him blundering about the cabin—and they had some trouble in persuading him to go back into his berth."

" But, of course, Mr Hitchcock, that proves it. I'm certain there's something in what I say. He's got either a touch of the sun (that's quite possible) or else has eaten some slightly tainted fish, and ptobably, if it's the latter, it happened at Marseilles, since you say he first complained after leaving there. It's sure to be fish, I think."

I remembered some I'd once eaten, and how bad I had been, and explained how upset I was for weeks

and weeks, and liable to outbursts of pettish temper, a sure sign of gastric disturbance.

Old Hitchcock shrugged his shoulders and said, maybe—maybe—in fact really quite likely. He also recalled a friend of his who had been very ill, and had become almost insane, temporarily, through eating shrimps that were just not so. It *must* be something, so why not that, after all ?

Dan and I were greatly relieved at this probable elucidation and did all we could to reassure Hitchcock. Dan said the best thing to do was to humour the fellow, let things go on quietly and not get in his way too much.

Telling us all about it and discussing it seemed to relieve our host's mind quite a lot and he perked up and became his jovial self once more. After the outburst in the chart-room, the skipper seemed to simmer down. He may, and probably did, realise that Silas J. was not the sort to stand any nonsense.

I caught a glimpse of him once or twice on the navigating bridge. He was a fine-looking man, very dark, almost Italian-looking, but under his swarrthy skin I fancied I detected a certain yellowish pallor such as I've seen in the face of a sick nigger. But he was very quiet, and so eminently reasonable in his manner, that I promptly dismissed the entire affair from my mind and enjoyed myself to my heart's content.

The scenery after leaving Monaco is wonderful, and Genoa plays " I'm king of the castle " on its tall rocky crags. It is truly an imposing place and seems a conglomeration of frowning fortresses, not merely one, with its great piles of massy buildings, such as the Northern Italians affect in their towns. Every villa seemed a bastioned stronghold, and of the commercial houses, none of them seemed smaller than the Bank of England. The Alpes Maritimes in their blue and silver majesty faded gradually away, and were replaced by the Ligurian Apennines, not quite so mighty nor yet so blue.

We sailed like a dream-ship through the blood-warm waters of the Ligurian sea, and presently we were under the lee of Corsica. Everyone hung over the rails and scanned the sides of the island, as they towered out of the sea, and every now and again shot up into a peak thousands of feet high. We saw little or no traces of towns or inhabitants. Of verdure there seemed to be little or nothing, except the mastich shrub; only the bare brown rocks, of a praline or burnt-sugar colour, or of what is much the same colour too, the scarred and seamed dial of an old adventurous soldier, scorched by the heat of the sun and tanned by the rude breath of the winds always beating on it. They quite reminded me of old fellows I've seen, with faces like besieged towns, battered, pitted and knocked about, but dauntless.

Upon our left lay Elba, by which we passed fairly close. In doing so, it was as if some great jar were given to the mind. Here, actually here, and not after all so long ago as all that, the Eagle of Europe was kept chained. The little wonderful man who, by the aid of some peculiar power generated within himself, changed the face of the world for so many years, was held here from April eighteen hundred and fourteen, till February eighteen hundred and fifteen, and from here made his escape. This wasn't ordinary history. It was true magic. Somewhere over there he had strained his eyes waiting, and strained his ears listening. What a mystery the man's whole career had been. What a mystery his beginning, what a mystery his end. An infinitesimal mighty seed of pollen, carried haphazard from the flower of some Imperial parent stem, dropped by chance in the little stony Corsican town. What was the link between this man and those other big men one read about in the history of Asia Minor and Greece or Rome, when these places were at the height of their powers? That is what I asked myself as we sailed by. Above all, he had been sufficiently a failure to be truly interesting, for the psychology of

failure is much more involved and curious than that of success, which can be attributed ninety-nine times out of a hundred to cheek, ordinary self-confidence or ignorance, which override circumstances, whereas failure may be due to goodness knows how many curious combinations of temperament and chance.

From the look of any land one could see in these regions, we were floating in an ocean whose bed was but the thinnest of thin crusts above earth's smouldering fires. It must be very thin—as evidenced by Stromboli, by which we should have to pass, towards eleven o'clock. About here it is known that new islands appear and old ones disappear, in the course of volcanic disturbances—so life can't be too dull for those who live on them.

It was somewhere about here that Paxman began to make dismal confidences again to Dan about the captain having the most awful dreams that the yacht was going to be shipwrecked and all hands lost. I was struck by hearing that the bad dreams were about a mishap to the party. Hitchcock hadn't mentioned this ; I suppose, so as not to make us feel uncomfortable. The crew were very upset about it and grumbling under their breaths. Some of them had planned that if he had any more bad dreams, they'd go ashore at the next stop and hook it quietly. Even though they were personally devoted to the owner, and pronounced their boss the best afloat, it was more than flesh and blood could stand. Sailors are notoriously superstitious, of course, so that was only to be expected. Andy, the coloured steward, was almost beside himself and lay down nearly all day, dosed with bromide. But Silas J. said nothing, and everything went so merrily up above that we couldn't really let the thing worry us. Someone else waited at table in Andy's place and the matter seemed to blow over. I had little doubt but that the second mate was an excellent man and there were several of the crew with jaws like steel traps. We had only to glance from them to our host to see that one

was on board an efficiently manned American yacht, and that a second and possibly a third string could be brought into action if the first failed.

The farther we got into the volcanic regions, the more a decided inclination to philander evinced itself on the part of the members of our party, and its various members sorted themselves amiably into twos. Diana and Vansittart—but their affair was an understood thing. Stalybrass and Lady Shaw. Her plump good humour acted admirably upon him; as she agreed with what he said before he'd said it, and this is, of all ways, the best way to deal with a man of his type. Miss Sadie very obligingly took on both the prince and Dan, and so, thank the Lord, I was able to see something of Celia. The others swopped about a bit, but Vanda, true to her promise to Celia not to plough people's feelings up more than she could help, contented herself with mothering the P.M., finding his glasses for him, or fetching cigarettes, or else somebody's short or shorter history of something or other, probably the Greek civilisations of the Peloponnesus. Not but what the P.M. would not have been ready for a mild flirtation. I overheard him say in an abstracted way that we owed it to ourselves to fall in love as often as we could, as it was only when one was in that exalted—though he feared also, slightly ridiculous—state that the great wonders of the earth could be fully appreciated, or that Nature revealed her inmost secrets to the children of men. Æsthetically speaking, he said, one was guilty of a greater crime against morality by not falling in love, as often as possible, than if one acted to the contrary.

Celia looked anxiously at Vanda, but that person laughed immoderately. I think she had contracted the pernicious habit from Celia of feeling that she was there to police people who were inclined to moral lapses, and was getting a lot of smug goody-goody satisfaction from it, just as carnal in its way as any other pleasure. It's a dangerous feeling to have

grow on one, and tends to make wrong-doing lose its zest. One should be jolly careful of this sort of thing, let me tell you, as you never know where it may stop. There was no need for Celia to fear that the P.M. could undermine her teachings. Vanda was bitten.

And all the time the yacht passed through the clear blue waters as if it were some sentient thing, some great white bird. I wondered whose idea it was to paint pleasure yachts white. I supposed that it seemed right, because, with their clear-cut speed lines, they suggest the lines of the white birds that hover about so gracefully whenever one gets near the land, and fold their tiny legs so neatly out of sight, like little card-tables in repose.

The faint lap of the little waves and the ripple of our own laughter were all the sounds that broke upon a silence rare in quality.

Stromboli was duly sighted. Nightfall had already set in and he flung his lurid glare far and wide—but by the time we reached Messina's straits even his last glow was gone, and what a sight met our gaze. Upon the velvet blackness of the night rose high the hills, with diadem on diadem of flashing light, ablaze from foot to peak on either side.

And in a wide and wonderful embrace, the land put out its jewelled arms and clasped the languid darkling sea, and each jewel had its trembling water twin. At Messina, every night of the year is a gala night, a festival of water, earth and flame. We hung spell-bound on the deck and watched breathlessly till the last jewel gleamed no more.

The imagination is always ready to draw comparisons between human creatures and the things they have created. I thought the town, seen so, that night, seemed like a dark and wicked beauty, queen of some lawless section of society, who had plundered men for diamonds and wore them unscrupulously to draw still more and satisfy her greed of gems.

"I can't believe it's real," someone whispered in my ear, and I whispered back, "I don't want to believe it's real." For myself I had felt the illusion grow from day to day that we were sailing through fairy seas into the stillness and beauty of a new world.

We seemed to float in a breathless tinted perfection, getting farther and farther by miles and miles from all that had been our old selves, and all that we had once thought or known; and nearer and nearer to what? Something stimulating and delightful, surely. The old yesterdays were gone and nothing now remained but an endless vista of to-morrows, all blue and rose.

It was here I think that I first realised how beautiful the world is, and how supreme the folly of man, that he should try to improve it or not try to grasp its significance.

The distant coasts as we passed them looked so lovely, they might, as far as we knew, have been inhabited by happy souls, already slipped away; freed from earthly things, to live in perfect peace and tend their gardens on the sunny slopes. The shores expanded into mountain ridges of soft bloomy purple hues, like the rounded sides of fully ripened grapes. Nature was full of inspiration. Every succeeding moment she set a different scene, and each as it came and changed, dissolving, took on every aspect of beauty and grandeur that could be possible; and every tint that an exquisite caprice could display to us came and went before our eyes. The blue enamel floors of the polished sea lay right up into the stilly bays, reflecting light, and with the varied colours of the land made a parquetry of as many dazzling shades as a painter's palette, freshly set. The glinting sunlight poured down on hill and valley, and turned vinegar to sweet in the little wayside orchards and vineyards.

Or perhaps it rained at sunset and the sky gave back to the sea what it had taken from it before, and in the act of restitution wept teeming tears of opal and dropped showers of gold upon the mountains of the

shore. Stern rocks and crags became impalpable as melting visions, a-shiver and a-shimmer in a rainbow mist; abandoning themselves in a swoon of beauty, they dreamt themselves away before our very eyes.

I wonder how I can describe the sunsets and sunrisings that I saw in those seas? Perhaps if I might be allowed to sit quietly in a room for a day, with my eyes closed, I could put words together that would show you something of what I saw there. I think the most beautiful of all, and far more beautiful than the coming of morning, was the dawn of night, as we saw it in those enchanted regions. When all the trooping colours of the day had gone and when the sun's last few rose beams faintly stained the sky, the world subdued, became a world of grey pearl and the firmament's dome, so faintly irised and dim of sheen as to seem like a great grey hollow half-a-pearl into which we looked up wondering. There was a hush, a pause, and something seemed to ascend to heaven from below, and our thoughts went with it, aspiring. Then the Night drew her cool black veils about her, and behold! the day was done.

And still we sailed on and on, and leaving Italy behind, we had almost reached the land of Greece. I did not go ashore at Corfu when we touched there. I preferred to hug the idea that these favoured isles were shrouded in mystery and enchantment. Floating in the sea, crowned with plumy groves as they materialised dimly and exquisitely, out of the magic mists, I told myself that they could never really be the habitations of ordinary human creatures like ourselves—subject to human ills and wants and bothers, toiling in the sun, earning and changing money. So all that day I stayed aboard the white vessel, contenting myself with rising with the sun's first rays and feasting my eyes and drinking greedily of all the loveliness I saw around me. The tamarisks and palms that fringed the edge swayed softly, whilst the island cast its perfect image in the waters down below. No one stirred. As I leant over the rails looking away, I felt

myself poised and enveloped in a delicious salty silence, deeply conscious of a tingling well-being, a gentle thrilling through all my members at the thought that I should be and have a part in all this circumambient radiant moment. Such a day it was as gathered one to itself and did not leave one a mere onlooker. Cords broke and let old burdens slip and roll away, and one felt strangely free.

Silent it was, for the whispering song of the waves, with their toneless *chanson chuchoté*, only served to mark the stillness more. Now and again, I'll admit, the sea uttered a soft sudden sound, as some wave, larger than the others, threw itself lazily on the beach. But it was distant and almost less than a sound. Slim boats, like swallows, skimmed close to shore. Little airs of the morning, shy and virginal, but promising later warmth, came over the waters (that were of a happy blue, like babies' eyes) to greet me, and certain it is that Nature makes much out of little—from the least tangible of things weaves the most wonderful. She takes the little moist breath that comes faintly off the sea and spins it into veils and scarves, and trails them over rock and tree, drifting them fairily, gauzily, airily, shading them with pretty tints. Shadows long and blue lay along the dreaming margins, and slipped away and came again. They were there and they were not there.

And so, thanks to the scotching of a transitory pang or two of idle curiosity, it would always remain for me, Phæcia. The Isle of Phæcia, where Ulysses had been thrown on a spuming wave-crest, and where King Alcinous made his fragrant gardens with ordered rows of pear-trees and pomegranates, luscious figs, olives in bloom and vine-trusses swelling in the sun. Gardens which knew no interregnum of frost, and in whose precincts the fruit trees were in constant bloom or bearing, and where, by the threshold of the house, were two monster dogs, made of silver and gold, guarding it.

The yacht lay within easy hail of some of the most pathetically modern-human scenes of the Odyssey. Blind though he was, old Homer has indicated the actual scenes where the incidents of his tales take place, almost to within a few feet. I could look across from where I was at a point of land sloping seawards to the right, where Ulysses, having broken away from his thraldom to Calypso, and leaving her island, was thrown up by the storm. He battled with the winds and the waves for days and nights, fought his way, so the story tells, by main force, out of the breakers, into a sheltered inlet, where a river flowed into the sea. There is the inlet, there is the river. Shivering with cold, broken with fatigue, he crept painfully and numbly into the land, and there found some olive-trees whose branches were so plaited and interwoven that they formed a shelter against driving rain and cutting wind. And there he, with his frozen hands, scraped out a deep bed for himself in the dry decaying leaves and piled them high and warm atop of his poor cold body.

To that same spot next morning came the Princess Nausicaa, daughter of Alcinous, with her maidens, to wash her bridal linen. You can almost place the spot by guess-work where the royal girl spread out her fine white linen on the bright grass, and where her maidens, playing together, flung the ball and losing it, set up such an outcry that they waked Ulysses and brought him out to beg for food.

We were almost following on Ulysses' track, for our next stopping-place was Ithaca, whither he repaired, wind and weather permitting (which was not for fully twenty years), to greet his wife Penelope, after his wanderings. It was strange afterwards, when things that were predestined to form part of our voyage had already occurred, to think back to the time spent here and to retaste its events and frame of mind, with, as it were, the additional flavour of what had happened subsequently. The long arm of coincidence is thrust

out in real life far oftener than anyone would be prepared to admit. Though I, for one, would never deny its strange and often toward appearance and interference, for my own life has been nothing but one long string of interwoven and, one might say, previously decided events, synchronised with the most meticulous care, so as to present themselves at the moment and place arranged for.

But I must not anticipate here, and what I refer to in these obscure phrases will crop up in due course.

According to the Odyssey, Ulysses slept most of the way here, and by so doing missed a lot, for there are things as wonderful to be seen here as any can be. To him the beauty of the Ionian nights may have meant nothing, blunted as he would be to them, by use. But to us, coming out of the West, they were more wonderful than the days and more awake. When nightfall came so quickly on the heels of the short Grecian twilight, the great velvet canopy above us was full, full of stars, like countless brilliant eyes. I begged a hammock from our host, and more often than not spent the first and middle watches on deck. The yacht clove silently through the spangled dark, displacing the reflection of these far-off planets, one of which had perhaps sent a little beam on a ten thousand years' voyage, to glitter in the waters of our sphere ; a message from another world, an age-old twinkle. Meteors, without the least sign of hurry, took an occasional unctuous golden course and plunged slowly into parts of space beyond the little ken of man. The night air came off the shore, sweet with the breath of wild thyme and oleander, stirring the hair on my forehead coolly. The sea, deep, dark blue, returned the gaze of the stars eye for eye. I lay on my back and looked up. I saw Alcor and Mizar, the first hiding behind the last : and Dubhe and Merak, large and throbbing in that foreign night. I saw the Pole star and its guards, and right above me was the Great Bear which turns on one spot and rarely dips its light in the water. It guided Ulysses, when by

Calypso's directing he kept it on the left hand for seventeen nights, till he was wrecked.

It is on these detached occasions that one becomes creepingly aware of a feeling that one is face to face with Time. Not the time that one has known hitherto, the time of business, or relaxation, of the street, the theatre or the home ; one's servant whose duty it is to help one to crowd more into the day, to avoid mistakes or confusion or overlapping of duties or pleasures. Nor is it any longer a small slave, kept on the end of a chain in an inner pocket or bound to one by a strap and told off to check the seconds as they pass hourly and daily. No, here it is great, dominant, all-pervading, all-powerful. The precise moment in which one lives, one knows to be of the direct line, a lineal descendant of the first moment of the creation of all things. Even more, of the original far-back instant ancestor of that moment too. Nothing separates you, now, from it, then ; it was the same then as it is now, and ever will be, world without end, amen, heaven help us all. It is on nights like these that the thought of eternity dilates a man's mind quite frightfully and appallingly, and daunts him with all its immensity. Time which we are told may be space. Space which we are told may be time. Both limitless. Time in these parts curdles a man's blood in his veins and wrings from him an astonished confession of his utter helplessness and impotency in the face of the great things that are. My brain reeled sometimes at it all, and I felt, for the sake of my mental balance, I'd be better off, even if not so cool, in my bright little cabin, smelling ever so faintly of fresh paint.

However, I usually stayed up, and one night, just as I was getting out of my hammock to go below, about —— bells, I saw a shadowy figure leaning far over the stern and gesticulating violently in the direction from which we had come. Peering closer I saw it was the captain. He appeared, as far as I could judge in that very early morning light, to be shaking his fist at thin air. I retired noiselessly, and was just rounding the

funnel when I ran full into Andy, the coloured steward, who, crouching in its shelter, was gazing in terror at the captain. His lips were grey and drawn back from a great quantity of very white teeth, and his white eyeballs bulged far beyond his eyelids. I motioned him to silence, and taking him firmly by the arm, I led him to the cabin, and there got him a drop of brandy from my flask, then roused someone and put him in his charge. Andy said not a word, obeying me quite meekly.

I was greatly discomfited and very annoyed at what I had seen and at having been roused from my pleasant dreamings and philosophisings of the last few idyllic days, and the recollections of this fellow's bad dreams and bad omens came over me with a rush. Towards morning one's vitality is at a low ebb, I suppose, and what had seemed absurd beyond words at Monte Carlo, with its gay meretricious society and ultra-modern way of life, here in these regions seemed quite another matter and almost within the bounds of possibility. Here, nothing would seem out of the way or unusual. These bays and islands were full of strangeness. If I had, in broad daylight, looked over the ship's side and seen a cluster of glistening-bodied mermaids and sea-nymphs, with long coils of water-weighted hair, beckoning me with their lovely humid arms, I'd really not have been surprised. I remembered the descriptions of the man's ominous prognostications of the evil and danger that he said were lying in wait for the pleasure party. Was there something abroad in the air here unlike anything we knew of in home waters and countries? Some mysterious affinity between the great old deities of Greece and little men, that gave them an inclination for meddling with the puny affairs of mankind. Perhaps they had nothing else to do, and the time hung heavy on their god-like hands. Was there some condition of the ether facilitating the transmission of unnatural messages to account for all this business? I had learnt indirectly that the captain was a Greek, or if not entirely Greek, certainly of Greek

origin. This appeared to me curious and most noteworthy and would strengthen the case for the working affinity between him and the supernatural forces which apparently prevailed here. Put it this way, that as he was a Greek, and unseen beings once all-powerful in these domains were desirous of welcoming one of their blood back from the distant parts of the globe, where he had long sojourned, and were, as a mark of appreciation and esteem, trying to give him warning of some disaster which might attend upon the ship under his care during the cruise. But if this were so, why be so vague about it? At my instigation, one of the crew had cross-examined our man, plying him with certain leading questions I'd set him to ask, and the entire thing was as nebulous as could be. Not a bit of definite information beyond the fact that the yacht was in danger of some sort. He wasn't ever told in his dreams how the danger could be averted or what we could do to prevent it, so where lay the use in worrying the man, to say nothing of such of us others as knew about it now, and old Hitchcock? Presumably the deities were well-meaning, but like so many well-meaning people, they liked to make a song and dance about the things they undertook; and that, even as the aforesaid people do, they interfered in things when they knew they couldn't do anything.

Else why couldn't they have saved us when the necessity arose, and said nothing beforehand, to spoil our pleasure.

I felt I'd better let Hitchcock know what I had seen, and did so, and in return heard that the captain had really been very odd indeed for the last three days. Not a bit inclined to sass, but sort of huddled up and very white and weak. Not eating anything at all. He gave no trouble, beyond the fact that he would not keep the log-book nor let the first mate do so either. But the matter wasn't pressed, as they didn't think it worth while to cross him, seeing that he was docile otherwise. When he, Hitchcock, went down to see

him about one thing or another, he could be heard muttering away and didn't seem to realise that the owner of the yacht was addressing him at all. However, the main thing was that he was no longer violent and on the whole was doing his work correctly. Bates, the first mate, was watching him ; an excellent fellow, quite ready to take a ship out on his own any day now, and he didn't at all mind the responsibility. If skipper got bad, they'd simply shut him up quietly and say no more, or send him home by land. Of course, if he could prove that he was all right in his mind and methods, he could claim a heavy sum for damages, but there were plenty of witnesses to testify to his odd behaviour.

Hitchcock's theory was that we were approaching a country which literally oozed superstition at every pore. In a way of speaking, it gave off puffs of it, and from inquiries made, skipper was certainly a full true Greek. One of the seamen had signed on at the same time as he had and he knew of it, and knew that he did so under an assumed name. Therefore, being the descendant of a people steeped in superstition for so many centuries, who had practically invented superstition, if it came to that, it was not so surprising that he gave way to this sort of thing, as it would have been if he had been a real white man.

Hitchcock's tone indicated a large degree of contempt for anything which did not come up to standard on that point. Unfortunately, he had got hold of some of these spooky books we'd brought along on the trip, and acting on a brain already prepared and, so to speak, weakened by his nationality, all the hereditary instincts of a foolish and credulous people now came out in his conduct. It wasn't insubordination. No man who'd lived as long as he had, in a land of liberty like America, would dream of being insubordinate to a man who owned as much money as he, Hitchcock, did. He didn't hold with all the superstition, but there was no denying that the atmosphere here was thick with it, for

he'd been reading some of these heathen mythology books, and it was quite the sort of thing to get on the nerves. The stories were most bloodthirsty and the gods of Greece seemed to him to have as slender a stock of morality as the smartest set in Noo York, and would not allow anything to trammel their natural inclinations to wickedness and debauchery generally.

Most of the party, and certainly some of the crew, had the matter on the brain. Far better to play bridge or poker, or some good round game, and try to forget it. Dan, present at our confabulations, prophesied that skipper would be worse before better, in the words of his old nurse ; for by nightfall we were due to slip past the Paxian Isles, and it was here, he said, according to Plutarch, Aemilianus the Rhetorician, voyaging by night, heard a voice, louder than human, announcing the death of Pan. Another spot, absolutely teeming with morbid associations and which now did not lie so very far away, was the headland of Leucadia, jutting out from the island of that name. It was the actual precipice of classic renown, the lovers' leap where so many hundreds of poor fools had met their deaths. Sappho herself, did we remember, knowing that love was too good a thing to last, chose drowning in the waters of the Ionian Sea rather than to go on living and see it die by degrees. So she sang her last song, broke her lyre and jumped off. Worse still—buttonholing us as we were turning to go—there would be the other headland of Tanaerium, if ever we got there—here he shuddered lugubriously—that according to the ancients was the entry to the Regions of the Dead.

Undoubtedly that night some of us turned in feeling very creepy and fantastic, and watching our shadows mistrustfully over half-turned shoulders. Some time after I had been asleep I woke up with a start and listened for the voice, but heard nothing except the usual small noises of the yacht as it sailed on through the night. The slight smell of fresh paint in my dear little cabin was so entirely reassuring, and hygienic,

and I felt sure microbe- and spook-proof, that I rolled over, and immediately went to sleep, as fast as could be.

Next day we succeeded in disentangling Ithaca from the clustering isles that lay about our prow, and without difficulty placed the narrow haven between the craggy points that guard the entrance—

". . . within which the water is so still that ships lie there without moorings, safe and motionless. At the head of the haven is a long-leaved olive-tree, overshadowing a cool and pleasant cave, sacred to the nymphs, called naiads of the running brooks. Inside the cave are bowls and pitchers of stone, and great stone looms, at which the naiads weave their fine fabrics of sea-purple dye. It is the favourite haunt of the honey-bee, whose murmurs, mingled with the splashing of perennial springs, make drowsy music in the place. There are two gates to the cavern, one towards the north, where mortal feet may pass, and the other on the south side, which none may enter save the gods alone. . . ."

Thus read Celia, from a translation of the Odyssey, with appropriate gestures.

Later on in the day, Celia fetched everyone to watch anxiously for the spot where the River Alpheus rushes out in pell-mell pursuit of the nymph Arethusa, who, flying from him across the Adriatic, swims straight to Sicily, with the river god close on her white heels all the way. Miss Sadie declared she saw something and that a peculiar and indescribable sensation went through her when the keel of the vessel passed over the supposed line of his ardent pursuit and her evading of him. A loud cry aft sent a thrill down everyone's spine and brought them tearing to look over the stern. The excitement was at fever pitch when we perceived that we were under escort of a school of jolly dolphins.

They accompanied us for quite a space, for the pleasure of our society, leaping up to attract our attention, riding on and rolling in the little side wash we made by our advance. Why, I don't know, but they seem to me the buffoons of the sea, with their curious antics and astonishing agility. It is said of them, that they enjoy the companionship of men and are most attentive to such ships that happen to come anywhere by their special haunts. By their connection with the legend of the poet Arion, who tells how they saved him from drowning, they gave a further fillip to the craze for romantic poetry and legend which had swept over us all. Celia lectured everyone on it, guests, maids, valets, and crew, all had to hear her, and I'm sure they enjoyed it. Her management of certain delicate situations, in the legends, due to the gods and goddesses having tendencies to depart sometimes from the strict path of virtue, according to our modern notions, was masterly. She handled them with a dexterity that was both amazing and elliptical. It was a triumph of "*leger-de-langue.*" Hey, presto! all the naughtiness was gone and nothing but the poetry remained. Stalybrass's neck, when he was roped in for these lectures, betrayed a certain restlessness, for though Celia's treatment was telling on him more and more every day, and had so far toned his natural downrightness as to make him sometimes NOT say what he thought about a thing, which previous to having met her he would have blurted out at once, still as yet, there it ended. Such parts of his external behaviour as he could control might be beginning to conform to social usage, but his inward and mental processes were still too honest and uncompromising to do so and you saw what he felt at once by his neck, which was in too close and constant a communication with his brain to be quickly or easily managed, swell up and go down as before.

I backed Celia in the long run, for she produced almost the same effects on people as an anæsthetic does, so that they became literally numb and acquies-

cent when under her influence. Then, when numb, she extracted from them anything she thought unsatisfactory and replaced it with what she thought more suitable, whilst her patients hadn't the least idea of what was happening to them.

But as yet poetry was like a red rag to a bull to Stalybrass. Poetry!!! It was facts, solid, hard, horrible facts that he hunted for, and dealt in. And oddly enough, he hunted for them in history. The last place I'd think of looking for them. He'd gobbled up all the large and larger histories, and now he had begun on the small and smaller ones. I used to sit and watch him from under my eyelashes (long ones, for a man, Celia says, and very nice too) and I used to study his face and wonder what further fallacies he was adding to his mental equipment.

No thirst for knowledge tormented the P.M. and he sat with his unread book open on his knee. He was out to forget unnecessary things and I could see him forgetting them. The puzzled look was fading from his eyes and his voice was returning to him. He was getting noticeably fatter; really quite fat; I'd hardly have known him for the same man. I found myself wondering if it continued whether his party would recognise him on his return or accuse us of having mislaid him and think that we were trying to foist an inferior article on them—holding, possibly, dangerous and subversive views, directly opposed to those he had held when they had chosen him as their leader.

Rankin, I found, had a good working knowledge of all that we were about to see. How he had found time to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, keep up his old father and mother's home, fight a hard fight and read all the good books he had read, was a mystery to me. I bowed my head before that man's scheme of life. It was so simple, so full and so unselfish. We'd many a long talk pacing the deck and exchanging all sorts of ideas, and there was a sweetness and a humble-

ness in his face that, truth to tell, I have only seen equalled in the smiling sadness of the faces of some kind old Jews I have known.

I tumbled to the fact that there was a certain rivalry between him and Stalybrass. Nothing acrimonious, for he'd never lend himself to that, but I could see, from what he said, that Stalybrass's following in the party was greater than his and growing fast. That his own kindly, disarming manner put him at a loss with the people whose interests he represented. As they themselves would have put it, what they wanted was a man with plenty of fight and go in him. And though I am positive that Rankin could have carried their propaganda into places closed to the other and won over people that the other would have lost as partisans, yet they preferred Stalybrass, with his big mouth full of nonsense. If I wasn't mistaken, Rankin was for a fairer distribution of the good and necessary things of life and devoted his life to trying to lessen the burdens where they bore too heavily on the poor. Stalybrass, though he didn't know it, I think was out to pluck things away from one class and give them to another and by so doing defeat his own ends.

Rankin told me sadly, that just because he was willing to meet the other side and tried to see their point of view, he was accused of pandering to the golden calf. I was very interested, for I felt that these two men in more ways than one were typical of a split which would sooner or later rend the party to which they belonged, asunder. So whenever Celia was busy administering her anæsthetic treatment to Stalybrass, Rankin and I would resume our peregrinations and communings, jogging one another's memories about the associations of what we saw, bridging gaps, each in the tale the other called to mind.

Beyond dispute, we could mark the place in Pylos' sandy cove, where the young, and, I always have thought, remarkably verdant, and also sometimes boring, Telemachus landed to seek tidings of his long-

lost father. Homer made a mistake in bestowing not one redeeming vice on that young fellow!

To pass lightly from the dim and legendary past to something nearer our own time, we noted that the high ascending slopes ahead of us, covered with quickly ripening corn, must have been the hill-sides so coveted of the Spartans to fill their granaries with yellow grain.

By degrees and for the course of some hours the yacht nosed her way through countless scattered islets, rocky, and entirely without vegetation, which added to the curious aspect of the scene. It gave us a queer and unexpectedly unusual sensation of pleasure to see that strange Peloponnesian coast coming near. Utterly inhospitable-looking, one might say, abandoned to the eagle, it yet had a charm all its own; or maybe I should say because of those very things. Nothing we had ever seen matched it in strangeness of outline, so that we stood and marvelled at it. Precipices and lonely tracts with stray goats a-grazing on crags that could only be reached by tiny cloven feet, but not anywhere a sign of man. Of traffic of the sea, there was none hereabouts, only a solitary sail, visible in an all-surrounding desolateness. And this was a coast which had once teemed with a virile and determined race. There was hardly any sign of it left now. Fading from our sight, dim and distant, could be seen the western hills of Elis, not so high nor so rich in recollections as those which lay closer to us. The plane-leaf formation of the promontories could not yet be made out, although we tried to trace it. Here there arose a chain of serrated ridges with ragged, jagged lengths of peaks cutting white into the sky. Below, the sea everywhere cutting deep into the edges of the land made long arms of it and so formed bay after bay, each one landlocked. The mountains, with their snow-drifted caps, uprose largely and were of a rich harmonious purple-blue like the deepest, darkest blue-bells, or the deeper, darker violets of an English spring, growing far back in the

shades of an English forest. Afar, in mists, were the mountains of Arcadia.

The nearer we got, the more abandoned the whole scene became. Rankin reminded me that these regions had been inhabited by Mainote pirates who in times gone past made the lives of sea-going merchants a terror to them and hardly worth the living. They lay in wait for them as they crossed the Gulf of Koron and held up their vessels, riding low in the water, heavy with wealth collected from all parts; packed to their fullest width with rich rolls of outlandish-figured brocades, carpets, jewels, pearls, bar-gold or treasures of fine workmanship, which were carried back and forth between the luxury-loving wide-apart towns of those days. The pirates are all dead and gone now, and even their creeks, where they left their plunder till they could fetch it, or those dead of the affrays, to rot, are deserted. But the whole rocky cape bears the stamp of the wild people who once infested it; for places, like countenances, will surely retain marks and signs of callings and occupations. Byron in his poetry wrote of them as picturesque and ardent lovers, good husbands and doting fathers; but for all that they were ruthless brigands, no more, no less, and to this day the thought of something savage and untamed springs to the mind at the sight of their old haunts. There are no villages dotted about, for each house is a square white tower, standing alone and fortified. The women and children alone used to dare to go out to till the fields, and the men stalked about shadowed by, and shadowing their enemies, from generation to generation after the manner of the Corsican vendetta. And yet Rankin said he'd heard that it was perfectly safe for foreigners to travel there and that such few people as still lived there were well-behaved to them. Physically they were said to be beautiful and were known to be of the pure old Greek blood.

The Gulf of Sparta gradually opened to view as we rounded the second serration of the Peloponnesian

plane-leaf. Try as we might, we could not get a glimpse of the city itself, and perhaps as it is a full fifteen mile inland it is not surprising. "Hollow Lacedæmon" the old poets called it, because it curves inland so very far. Here the harbour-ways are deserted too and half destroyed—the ships that frequented them set sail one day and have not yet returned.

High above, and a landmark to all who come this way, is Mount Tagyetus, its passes still dusted with snows, and covered on all its precipitous sides by the dark forests through which ages and ages ago the Spartan youths hunted their famous Laconian hounds. On making Cape Malea, we swept it carefully with our glasses, for on the very extremity lived an old Greek monk who had made his dwelling on a little platform jutting right out over the sea depths below. It appears his practice was to come out of his cell and stand there and bless all ships in passing. Though he must have died ages ago, for I'd read about him in a book written eighty years before, still we stared, fascinated, at the little platform, half expecting to see him come out and look round and lift his skinny kindly arms in benediction to us. His arms can't have been very fat, for all the food he had, he got from a tiny patch of corn grown by himself. The merest suspicion of a path led to his lonely, eerie cell. Nothing but the sisters and brothers of the little goats we'd seen agraze earlier in the day could have negotiated it, so he must have been as much alone as a man could wish to be. Some instinct had driven him there; probably he was a poet without knowing it and heard that strange seductive voice that calls the artist to the waste and windswept places of the earth, to face nature alone. Was he after all to be pitied? All the airs blew in on him utterly uncontaminated, and each day he saw the panorama of the coming and going of the sun, never two succeeding days the same.

Far away to the south-east lay Crete and Mount Ida, her base invisible in invisible mists. She is queen of

those very distant island Alps, though cut off from her undoubted relations of the adjacent continent by the waters of the Ægean Sea. But for all her isolation her past importance has been great. Fires lit on her southern sides could flash a signal-blaze in times of war to half the Archipelago and rouse the inhabitants of the other islands to arms.

Crete was the stronghold of the Phœnicians, for they colonised her. And further back than that the island is associated with the stories of the old poets, of Minos and the human sacrifices to the Minotaur, or the more genial themes of Ariadne and Bacchus with his splendid gift of thirst.

By the beams of a fitful moon (for a light breeze dragged stray wisps of cloud across her half-formed face and would not let her shine on us undisturbed) we drove through the Hermione Sinus. It was no loss not to see it, for even by that poor light I could tell that a more barren land could never rise upon the eye ; the ancients considered this part of Greece so near to hell (so says the guide-book) that they omitted to put the usual obolon into the hands of those who died there, to pay their passage across the Styx. It certainly seemed a blasted shore and gave one the shudders to look at it.

By midnight of the same evening of passing through these straits we reached the island of Ægina and anchored off it, within about a mile of its tiny capital. On the morrow we'd enter the Piræus.

We lifted our anchor very early and steered towards Athens at a speed rather less than five knots to the hour. Thus by advancing gradually from some distance off, we'd see everything in its entirety. And by our slow approach to her across the sea, we would at once realise something of her majesty and the matchless splendour of her position, and thus the psychological value of the first impression made on us by what was really one of the Seven Wonders of the World would not be lost or in any way diminished.

Quite wisely our host considered that for him to bring us there in the ordinary way would be a mistake, for working slowly round the adjacent coast and coming abruptly into her harbours from behind a corner we would receive an entirely unworthy idea of her greatness. So for the moment behind us lay Ægina, which later we'd explore, but for the present disregard. Looking back, upon a craggy bluff, seen sky-high from below, were the last remaining upright pillars of what had once been a gigantic edifice enclosing altars sacred to the worship of Jupiter Panhellenios. The rest lay scattered broadcast; big drums aslant, flowered capitals and gigantic bases. We watched it recede with curious feelings, for to this very spot we knew were banished Aristides, and the great, wise Demosthenes. After years upon years of intelligent and foresighted service given to the State, their liberties were removed from them and they were confined within this little land—a punishment out of all proportion to any mistakes they had ever made. It was unthinkable. To this island Plato was shipped and on it sold as a slave; a deed the thought of which, estimated by the value set on the man nowadays, sent a modern shiver down a modern spine, and made one blush a modern blush for the perpetrators of a mistake which for sublimated senselessness has never had an equal.

Just as we looked now so they probably stood and strained their eyes across this intervening space of water, trying vainly to make out the distant outlines of the city they had loved so well. In spite of the sun one felt a little cold sadness come over one at realising that what greeted our eyes coming here now, as strangers —isles, coasts, mountains and promontories—had so often greeted the eyes—as familiars—of those who had been the makers of the place's history, when they returned, worn out, but glad, from distant embassies, or expeditions made in necessary defence of far-off possessions or perhaps of the country itself.

Alcibiades, the attractive and handsome adventurer,

dandified and fashionably profligate, but for all that a consummate general, came back to these very ways from his campaigns and conquests in Asia Minor; and his victorious galleys, manned every one of them by the toughest and most sea-learned sailors, swarmed and darkened all these sounds and straits. His soldiers, rough with joy, shouted hoarse greetings to masses of people waiting for their disembarkation, eager to hear their tales and to help to carry home the booty they'd won, thanks to his strategy. Miltiades, a century before him, likewise saw all these, and Themistocles his contemporary, the very subtlest and most knowing of soldiers and ministers too, having rendered incalculable services to his country, in conquering and scattering the mighty hosts of Xerxes. He must have seen it inversely to our seeing it, as he fled to Persia, chased by a mob howling for his faithful blood and quite forgetful of what he had done for his country. The study of Greek history is not one to encourage patriotism, for it is nothing but a long list of banishments and ingratitudes. Even Pericles the lofty—and no wiser or more disinterested administrator ever lived—died overwhelmed by a flood of vituperation, reviled by the citizens by whom he was owed so much. But for the help he gave to Aspasia and to the group of elever men she gathered round her, the Acropolis would never have been built, nor would other public works which have come down as examples of surpassing beauty to mankind ever have been achieved.

But we were drawing close and there before us was Athens.

Athens! Radiant and glittering in the morning sun, throned high above all other things about her, her ruined temples were still a glory and a challenge to the world. In pride and splendour their columns raised themselves, saffron and burnt-gold, against a canopy of deep lapis-lazuli blue, the intense, imperial blue of the

attic heavens. Athens, the classic city, mother of all the learning, wit, grace, beauty and art of the Old World, where an almost inexhaustible scroll of history unrolled itself; from whom gushed the fountain of thought to which all of us must come to drink at some time or another of our lives! The lion-hued rocks out of which she gradually rose and on top of which she took her final stand, piled themselves up about her in a foreign ruggedness and strange grace. At her feet to right and left the lesser cities of the shore and valley lay in ruins, their palaces and pillars, colonnades and pediments strewing all the ground.

A motley host of shipping, Eastern and Western, of different kinds and colours, with orange-tawny sails of curious forms, clustered at her quays and lifted a tangle of masts like a company of ragged spears. If you had melted a sapphire and cupped it in a goblet blown from the crystal airs of the morning, and gently moved it to a sparkle, there was the sea, brimming, beautiful.

Somewhere beyond amongst the peaks that backed her would be the slopes of Mount Hymettus, where the bees sucked the honey eaten and sung about at least three thousand years ago. The songs have come down to us and the honey they say is still found and drawn by swarms of little drowsy humming fellows. I almost thought I heard them, but I suppose it was my fancy.

Her Alpine hills descend gradually in a gently broken line, part veiled, as is their habit, it is said, in mazy morning mists, to where out of the horizon rears up the promontory of ancient Sunium. Thirteen dazzling columns crown it, washed to such a whiteness by the flying spray that for miles and miles they can be seen and their whiteness serve as a guide to sailors far across the main.

The P.M. was talking softly to me and looking before him. He said he doubted if she—he always spoke of Athens as she—could be less dignified in her destruction

than in the days of her prosperity. I had my Byron in my hand and it was open at "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage." We found these lines:

"A thousand years scarce serve to form a state;
An hour may lay it in the dust: and when
Can man its shatter'd splendour renovate,
Recall its virtues back, and vanquish Time and Fate?

And yet how lovely in thine age of woe,
Land of lost gods and godlike men, art thou!
Thy vales of evergreen, thy hills of snow,
Proclaim thee Nature's varied favourite now:
Thy fanes, thy temples to thy surface bow,
Commingling slowly with heroic earth,
Broke by the share of every rustic plough:
So perish monuments of mortal birth,
So perish all in turn, save well-recorded Worth."

It's five miles from the Piræus to the town and each succeeding mile overflows with history, monuments and remains of all sorts. We got to know every step of the way, for we did not put up on land, preferring to return each night to the cool luxury of the yacht in the Piræus. We either walked or rode the five miles daily or else drove in every sort of conveyance imaginable, from native carts to fine private cars. Miss Sadie and I got hold of a few horses when we had been there a few days, through a rich merchant who had had business relations with her father. They were, I think, Turkish, with a touch of Persian. As a type they were not familiar to me, but they were extraordinarily fast and surefooted.

We explored every nook and corner, and the enthusiasm of the party at finding themselves where they were was beyond description. Even the crew went off in solid batches, armed with guide books and binoculars and parcels of food. Some of the men were quite intellectual-looking, with bony prominences on their tanned foreheads, and, like good citizens of the

United States, they were out to learn all they could. Many a time I saw them returning full of knowledge, with their white duck pockets bulging with souvenirs bought or purloined. I met the skipper once or twice prowling about; he greeted me civilly and seemed healthily interested in all he saw. I had heard it said that he was himself again, or very nearly, as he was taking his meals and swearing with the regularity of a clock.

When we first climbed to the top of the Acropolis, and reaching the Parthenon stood looking around us at Greece, we all felt that to have seen it was something to have lived for. We saw now that we were in a new and strange land and that the city below us in no way resembled any other we had ever seen. We stood grouped under the great portico, and there to right and left spread out before us lay the scenes where some of the greatest human dramas enacted since the beginning of the world had taken place. In front of us stretched chain after chain of lofty mountains, and in one it seemed as if a broad portion had been swept aside, and there in the gap lay "shining Corinth" and even at that distance we could distinguish the Acro-Corinthus, the strategically placed rock which commands the whole Peloponnesus, Argolis, Corinth, Messenia, Laconia from end to end. Diogenes lived at Corinth and thither went the glossy perfumed Alexander, clanking in his cuirass and military accoutrements, to speak to the surly and, as may well have been the case, not over-clean philosopher. Close at hand, so near that we could have hailed a man there from where we stood, was Mars Hill, the Areopagus, with its crowding, teeming, jostling associations. How often of a summer's day I had pored over dusty school-books, dog's-earing them, and yawning. How bored I had been, and how languid was the attention I gave to them, and now how suddenly their contents all seemed to live before me. I groped in my memory and tried to recall something of all the doings there, of

which I'd read. The very heart of ancient Athens might be said to have beaten there at that place. The beginnings and rudiments of all government had first transpired and been hammered out there. When there was an autocracy, the king or head-man went there and assembled his nobles and through them told the people of his decisions ; later king and nobles met and discussed measures and gave out the result of their combined decisions to the people, and this was a step further. Later still came Cleisthenes, who was the first democrat and who, in the words of Herodotus, was the first to give the people a share in their own government by consulting them there. Several hundred years after came Pericles, who canvassed his supporters, actively and personally, and managed them so well that he became sovereign-paramount in power. His orations were delivered in the intervals of his campaigning there. From one of the dog's-eared books, much against my will, I had been obliged to translate portions of a speech he once made on the internal condition of the State. He said :

"There is no exclusiveness in our public life, and in our private intercourse we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbour if he does what he likes : we do not put on sour looks at him which, though harmless, are not pleasant. While we are thus unconstrained in our private intercourse, a spirit of reverence pervades our public acts, we are prevented from doing wrong by respect for authority and for the laws, having an especial regard to those which are ordained for the protection of the injured as well as to those unwritten laws which bring upon the transgressor of them the reprobation of the general sentiment. And we have not forgotten to provide for our weary spirits many relaxations from toil ; we have regular games and sacrifices throughout the year ; at home the style of our life is refined ; and the delight that we daily feel in all these things helps to banish

melancholy. . . . Our city is equally admirable in peace and in war. For we are lovers of the beautiful, yet simple in our tastes, and we cultivate the mind without loss of manliness. Wealth we employ, not for talk and ostentation, but when there is real use for it. To avow poverty with us is no disgrace; the true disgrace is in doing nothing to avoid it. An Athenian citizen does not neglect the state because he takes care of his own household, and even those of us who are engaged in business have a very fair idea of politics. . . . To sum up: I say that Athens is the school of Hellas, and that the individual Athenian in his own person seems to have the power of adapting himself to the most varied forms of action, with the utmost versatility and grace. In the hour of trial Athens alone, of all her contemporaries, is superior to the report that is spread of her. No enemy who comes against her is indignant at the reverses which he sustains at the hands of such a city; no subject complains that his masters are unworthy of him. And we shall assuredly not be without witnesses; there are mighty monuments of our power which will make us the wonder of this and of succeeding ages. . . . For we have compelled every land and every sea to open a path for our valour, and have everywhere planted eternal memorials of our friendship and our enmity."

The man who uttered these entirely modern and English sentiments transacted for the Government its business with his followers in the political Agora, and there the place stood before our eyes. All around here and about where we were glancing he had moved, lived, loved, and taken Aspasia the Hætera to wife, and somewhere here he may have been seen to weep like a child when he put a wreath on his dead son's funeral bier.

This hill or mound must have swarmed with the people of the town once, a keen, critical and sarcastic crowd I take it, quite sharp Cockneys in their ways.

Euripides, Aristophanes, Xenophon and Peraclitus frequented it ; and old Socrates came there and talked willingly with anybody who wished to speak with him, until such time as the representatives of the people thought him so wise as to be dangerous and gave him a cup of poison to drink.

And in place of all this inspired hubbub, now reigns . . . silence.

We could see the little wandering River Ilyssus in the plains below and near it we could make out the ruins of another mighty temple raised to Jupiter. Not very far from that again were distinguishable the last foundations of the Lyceum, still shadowed as of yore by sacred olives, undoubted and self-sown descendants of the trees under which Aristotle, scholar and benefactor of all mankind, must have rambled as he discoursed with his pupils, teaching them what he knew or had discovered of the science of pure reason, or as we now call it, logic. Also paving the way by his studies for abstruse mathematical discoveries, and so on, until he was foolishly suspected of some treason or other and driven with fury into the wilderness. It is to be supposed that the puny people who hounded him out would not understand that a man, with a great mind full of abstract thought and questions about things which would be of great benefit to mankind, has not got time for petty treasons or other useless matters.

A great gulf separates his day from ours and yet, I reflected, for all the lapse of time, it is almost as dangerous to think new thoughts to-day as it was then, and his modern followers evade ostracism by carefully hiding the fact that they think them. They have profited by the study of his life and its ends in this respect, that they have learnt enough to hold their tongues.

By climbing over the fallen marble columns or portions of broken statues, commemorating some poor

long-dead chap's triumph, or parts of some altar dedicated to a goddess, controlling certain destinies or matters Grecian, we reached the western corner of the Acropolis. Looking away down the gulf, we could just discern Ægina half visible, half invisible, veiling herself in warm dim mists, and that little morsel of a rocky island, "Sea-born Salamis" who in her day had been a little discontented Ireland, hatching sedition and rebellion within the very gates almost of Athens, till Solon set upon her and conquered her. Standing so, it is easy enough to see the lie of Grecian history and to grasp the meaning of its wars. For Attica you can perceive to be a great plain surrounded by mountains forming valleys, the entrances to which could be easily held, thus making the inhabitants of the Attic lands disinclined to submit to the inhabitants of the Eleusis, Marathon or other valleys, coming in and settling. In other words, nature having supplied them with natural fortifications, they proceeded to consider anyone beyond them as their natural enemies. Had these mountan ridges not existed, they might have thought it worth while to cultivate each other's friendships and lived at peace. Intercourse, however, between the inhabitants of Bœotia and Attica would be right out of the question, for range after range of peaks separate them; glens and defiles and mountain passes, any of which could be held by a handful of men opposed to vast legions attacking them. From which it may appear that beautiful scenery may very well lead to international complications. To the left one saw the chain of Parnes stretching all along to the north-west side until finally it merges into the sea, terminating boldly in the point called Corydallis, opposite the little Isles of Salamis. The curator of the temples pointed out the only three possible places of egress. That of Tala leading to Tanagra. The pass of Phylæ where brave Thrasybulus and his followers recovered its liberty for Athens—and the last and lowest—the pass of Daphne along which the sacred procession of Eleusis

passed at the time of the mysteries, and along the route of which, he said, could now be seen the votive tablets, set in niches, to the honour of the goddess Aphrodite.

In a party containing such active and varied intellects as ours, you need not doubt but that the deepest interest was aroused by our surroundings. We were full of curiosity about everything. Ordinary guide-books we gave up as hopeless and inaccurate and there was a frenzied delving into the books our host had originally provided for the use of the expedition. Not that these sufficed ; they soon ran out and we ransacked the town and stole or borrowed everything in the way of a book that could be procured within a ten-mile radius, and having got them we read them greedily. When we got home late to the yacht we were almost too absorbed to change our clothes or wash our hands or brush our hair. We'd be comparing coins we'd picked up or odd things purchased from the bandits who offer them for sale in the shops, or streets. We were a grubby lot just then but very healthy. Discussions over names, dates or racial characteristics raged at every meal. Books were brought to table and got mixed up with salad or Sauce Tartare. Some of them were rather dry and Nancy (who was not quite so bitten as the others and confessed frankly that such things bored her) suggested a little tea or nice juicy marmalade would not do them any harm. Dan said he had a great idea to bring out a book which would be the right shape to prop against a teapot while you ate fried eggs and bacon, or soup. It was to be a sort of hybrid, something between a book and a tea-cosy. This sally of his was received with applause. Somehow Dan always got his jokes to go well, but he had an annoying way of blowing his nose like a trumpet as soon as I began to tell a funny story so as to spoil my effect entirely. But then Dan has got no fine feelings.

The P.M. really knew a terrific lot. He was worth all the books put together. For instance, he knew that in the Peloponnesian wars the allies of the Athenians were the Megarians, the Bœotians, the Phocians, Leucadians and the Ambraciotes. He knew that Pericles had a sound foreign policy and wanted a united Greece under Athens. And he could have led us blindfold to all the spots where the most exciting things had happened. Thanks to him we became quite familiar with all the old heroes and philosophers and felt as if they were intimate and personal friends. Partly, too, I suppose because they'd been dead for so long, we had forgotten they were no longer alive. The prince kept us wonderfully right about dates, for as they work backwards from the Christian era, they were a source of utter puzzlement to the ladies of the party. But as Lady Shaw pointed out, no wonder he knew them, for in a way the whole history of Greece was his own family history. He was to all intents and purposes the direct descendant of Agamemnon and his modesty about it was beautiful. Diana said she felt sometimes that she was prying into his private affairs when she inquired into the principal happenings of Ancient Greece, and when it came to scandal, as in the case of the naughty handsome Alcibiades and his poor long-suffering wife, she felt quite embarrassed if she discovered he was within hearing when it was mentioned. It appears he had been a sort of cousin of his, though naturally it was some time back. But far and away beyond other things the interest in the political dissensions waxed feverish. We had not been long in Athens before our little happy family split itself into two well-defined parties ; one in favour of the Ionians, the other in favour of the Dorians. The arguments raged so fiercely that for the time being three or four promising flirtations were suspended, as the people engaged in them (or about to become engaged) took opposite sides. I'm sure it is much easier for stupid people to remain fast friends and love one another as

they should, than it is for clever people. Stupid people, knowing and thinking and talking less, have less to disagree about. Celia was practically the leader of the Ionian party and seemed to regard me as leader of the Dorian or opposition (otherwise Spartan or Lacedæmonian party). The former people she said were always forward in trying new things, anxious to learn, open-minded and tolerant, and gave a welcome to strangers entering their gates, whereas the Spartans were always cold and haughty, barely ate enough to live on, and ate it in a common mess-room, and hated strangers and everything new. Celia spouted Pericles' speech to them of which Thucydides had kept a record. It went this way: "You"—she addressed me—"*you* never advance. *They* never hang back. *They* love to serve abroad. *You* seem chained at home. *They* are bold beyond their means, venturesome beyond their judgment. *You* do even less than you are able to perform!" and a lot more in the same strain. "They" meant the Ionians—that is, Celia and her little lot. "You" represented Miss Sadie, Vansittart and I. We replied that this was all very well, but the Athenians, otherwise Ionians, did nothing but talk all day, and what was worse, listened to each other talking, whilst the Dorians were tough chaps who spent their time in good wholesome outdoor occupations, fighting and plundering weaker neighbours and so on, and what they did not know of sport was not worth knowing. Besides they had what, according to the experts, the Ionians lacked, a sense of humour.

She called me from now on "the Lacedæmonian."

The P.M. used to be frankly distressed by these arguments, which he said were so typical of all the foolish prejudices which had kept the world from going forward for so many years, and that it was quite ridiculous for anyone to contend that any one nation or set of people had all the virtues as opposed to any other nation; that most human beings (barring accidents due to bad leadership by decadent monarchs or dishonest

statesmen) will have good and bad in them in much the same proportions. And that anyway, for a man to boast about the good that was in him was to give it the lie and make an ass of himself. In years to come when people were more enlightened it would be made penal for a man to swank about his nationality or say anything to stir up bad blood or bitterness between himself and a man of some other race. Stalybrass, true agitator that he was, delighted in these tussles and poured oil on the troubled flames and kept things going. And frankly there is something about the air of Athens that makes one itch to talk, and we turned the Parthenon into a debating chamber, and aired our views *ad infinitum.*

I call to mind a particular afternoon of one sunny Grecian day that found us assembled there, grouped variously on fragments of sculptured pediments or great overthrown frustra that lay scattered here or there. The ladies (I can see them now) so picturesque, so dainty, in cool embroideries or thinnest of white silken things, their clear pale faces shaded by wide soft brims, and gauzy veils, half turned aside. The bright sun with glowing force struck sudden beams and quick reflections off the dazzling sides of the polished marbles they half leant, half sat on, catching at their eyes and refracting softly from them again in little shimmering lights. We rested our frames full-length on the warm broken floors in whose crannies and crevices the wild flowers grew in tufts. We were all, I think, conscious of a not altogether unpleasant limpness due to questing up and down the steep hill-sides in search of antiquities, of which, the more we found, the more there seemed to be.

At first no one spoke but remained quiet, just idly glancing at the surrounding prospect, drawing in all its fairness. But by degrees, as our slight bodily exhaustion passed away, our natural, and I am afraid never-long-to-be-kept-in-abeyance, tendency to argument asserted itself, starting from comments made on

what we saw about us. As usual, this gave Stalybrass, prone to much talk, his opportunity. You can imagine from my description of him, how Athens overflowed with approval and proof positive of the soundness of his ideas. He didn't in the least figure to himself that Athens had been there long before he had been even thought of, and that he was looking through the wrong end of the glass. He thought Athens confirmed his theories whereas he merely strove to confirm hers at second-hand; blissfully regardless that he got them originally from her and that he was nothing but an echo, and a bit late at that, of ideas that had been bandied from lip to lip there five centuries before the Year of Grace, One.

It was a great moment for him when he first set foot on the soil of Greece, the sacred place where Democracy first had its rights recognised and held its beacon aloft as a guide to all the world.

"Greece was the land of liberty. . . ."

"Yes, and look at her now," interjected Vansittart.

"Yes," said the P.M., taking the words out of his mouth, "look at her now. It's odd that man who is supposed to be more intelligent than the animals should crave for such absurd things, and things which are so bad for him. The wolf pack has its laws and observes them—the jungle has its laws and observes them. The birds of the air, too, have their laws, and no bird must break them. It is only man who demands liberty and insists on his right to go to the devil in his own way, oblivious of the fact that he imperils the whole community by doing so, as the actions of each one of us affect our neighbour, and we none of us stand alone. It is because the gods cursed him with the gift of speech. In that, animals are our superiors; they cannot make foolish requests or prove that what is bad is good, as man can, for luckily for them they cannot talk."

Stalybrass did not listen to this. He was thinking of what next he would say himself.

"Demacracy"—how he mouthed the word—"De-

macracy " as he pronounced it, opening his mouth wide like a fish, and getting purple in the face. We had timed him during his stay in the land of Liberty. He used the word at least once in every fifteen minutes during the period he was there. We ragged him a good deal that day, I'm afraid, for when he raised his hand impressively and asked us to remember, to please remember, that it was through the mouths of the Greek statesmen that the world had learnt the great truth that all men were equal, Dan broke in and said, " What nonsense ! How on earth can you say that all men are equal when you know some men have more cheek than others ? "

Dan stood up as he put this question and spoke very loudly, for if you wanted to make Stalybrass listen to anything that might disprove one of his theories you had to shout, and it's easier to shout standing. I liked to see Dan go for him and enjoyed the contrast between them that day. It was so acute as to have a strong artistic and dramatic value. Dan was a decorative fellow, a completely good-looking young rascal, perfectly suitable as a set-off or adjunct to any noble-looking ruined temple. He had a hardy high-bred face and a head-well-up, dominating sort of grace about him that made poor old Stalybrass, with his bunchy shoulders and aggressive trestle legs, look pretty hopeless in comparison.

Stalybrass' ideas may have been more in harmony with his Greek surroundings than Dan's, but his body wasn't, and Dan's was. However, Hitchcock backed up Stalybrass. Not really because he agreed with him, but because he saw by his purple face and bulging eyes that if someone didn't agree with him and that quickly, he might die of apoplexy and we would not be able to set out upon the expedition to Olympus next day. He waved his green cigar at us and said that there was more in what he said than met the eye, and that we should keep an open mind about things like that, and that they held those very views in Poughkeepsie, for they'd told

him so, and would we all remember it was too hot to argue. Of course it will have been discovered before this that if one wished to be unusually emphatic or screamingly funny or clinch a remark completely, one made some reference to Poughkeepsie, varying the pronunciation by sometimes pronouncing it in the common way and sometimes in the swank way.

So we left him alone for a bit and he continued unmolested for the time being. He said Mr Hitchcock was right in advising us to keep an open mind and when he said an open mind he did not mean a leaky mind, and he glowered at us. He had dug up the information that Cleisthenes was the father of Demacracy—if you excepted Solon, who had been a rare fine chap in his day—and extolled him to us with a plentiful accompaniment of neck and jaw swelling and subsiding. He told us where we could find a paragraph proving that there had been active efforts towards communism in the year, I forget what, B.C., and that they had been brought to considerable fruition by one Phaleas of Chalcedon. But on the other hand he mourned the fact that there were no records in any of the books he had read of any organised efforts towards Trade Unionism. What opportunities for a really good combination of go-ahead unions there must have been in a country where they had a religion that necessitated the constant erecting of temples to numerous gods at all costs. Here he waved his arms, indicating the remains of the great building in which we sat.

At this Rankin twinkled dryly and thanked all the gods he knew of, and he'd made the acquaintance of a good many new ones lately, that such things had not existed in the old days, for if so there would have been nothing of the Parthenon and all the wonderful edifices of the Acropolis. " Why, this thing I'm sitting on "—it was a colossal fluted portion of a column weighing perhaps some five or six tons—" judging by this, and according to trade union calculations, based on the efforts required with regard to the lifting of weights

and the standardised expenditure of exertion authorised by trade union rules, taken in conjunction with the number of working hours they sanction at tenpence per hour for so many days in the year, excluding Bank Holidays and Boxing Day and several months in the year to rest and think things over and to prevent themselves from becoming too expert at their job—it would have taken ten thousand years to build up Athens at her best, and all the money in the world would not have been able to pay for it."

This is not really what he said, for it was too technical for me to follow very thoroughly, but roughly that is what it sounded like. I think he was quite a mathematician.

This remark, though it's rather long and weighty to be called a remark, was brushed aside by Stalybrass. He went in a great deal for brushing aside what Rankin said. He changed the subject back to Demacracy. Time was up anyhow. Greece had risen to greatness through its Demacracy and it was all as plain as a pikestaff to him that all the muddles and weak spots in our present-day civilisation would vanish if only we would return to the election of a five hundred by drawing lots. And if even that failed there were so many other great things to be done, through, by and with Demacracy, that everything could be put right if only the right men were allowed to take the matter in hand. He led us to infer pretty clearly that had things so happened that he himself, for instance, had been born under circumstances suited to it or in a place where there were opportunities for a man to rise swiftly to high places, he could have governed a country with one hand tied behind his back.

Someone, perhaps Miss Sadie, softly sighed and wished the people in Poughkeepsie could have heard him talk as they would have enjoyed it so. The dear old P.M. heaved a sigh and asked if he might tell us a story. There was a chorus of "Yes!" Well, it was his privilege to count among his friends a multi-millionaire.

Not an American this time, but an Englishman, who had all his life been an ardent collector of the finest specimens of china, so that at the moment of speaking he had a unique collection of the rarest pieces, some of them of incalculable artistic importance and representing enormous sums of money. Famille Rose, Famille Verte, Sang-de-Bœuf, priceless old Ming. Their monetary value might be gauged if he were to tell us that some of the individual pieces, if sold at current market prices, might fetch anything between five and eight thousand pounds each and he wouldn't say but that if a man really wanted one of them very badly he might have paid ten thousand pounds down for it. When the experts came to see the collection and to make notes of the items and to feast their eyes on the colouring or glaze of certain noteworthy pieces, their knees trembled and their hearts fluttered, and they declared they felt faint with apprehension because they knew the value of what they handled, and the fragility. But his housemaids, he said, dusted them quite casually, moved them this way or that, knocked them about as if they were only worth tuppence-halfpenny, and never grew pale at spring cleaning times; just dumped them down off-hand.

No one said anything when he finished for a few moments and then suddenly the prince clapped his hands enthusiastically and called out "Bravo! Bravissimo!" Nancy shook her head and couldn't see it and Dan explained in tones sufficiently loud to reach Stalybrass that it was the P.M.'s kindly and courteous way of saying that fools step in where angels fear to tread.

Stalybrass snorted. That quotation was responsible for a lot of mistakes, and had put lots of people off doing things that needed doing and might just as well have been done by them as by anyone else. Lady Shaw opened her parasol with a click, and said it was a pity we all argued so constantly, and that we took things to heart too much and read and thought far too

much about the history of the place and what was the cause of this and what was the cause of that, as if our knowing was going to help matters. Personally she was just going to enjoy things and take things as she found them and not worry; the sunsets and the lovely air and the drives and all that.

Celia made a little clucking noise with her tongue, conjecturing in an undertone to me that her fatal complacency was ruining her figure, and that a little worry would improve it.

Miss Macinerney was entirely with Lady Shaw about not reading Greek history. She said the study of it made her feel so low in herself. It was too awful to think that all these splendid fellows whose marble busts one sees in the museums and in all well-regulated country mansions had been treated so badly. There they were. They'd done everything they could for their country and never spared themselves and left words of wisdom behind, which children wrote out in copy-books, and yet they had all been murdered or banished. She ticked them off. There were Plato and Socrates and Aristides and Demosthenes—and Aristotle—and Themistocles—and a heap of others—oh yes—Pheidias the Sculptor, who had done the most exquisite work and who had been accused of stealing the gold that decorated the statues that once stood where we now stand, and the poor creature—a most charming man, she had heard said—died in prison the day before his trial!

The P.M. shook his head sadly. The list, even incomplete, furnished an indictment against the whole human race. For many years he had felt that anyone who had any real conception of the folly and ingratitude of men would never make the slightest attempt to take any part in their government. He'd even go further—bother his head to try to do any good work in the world at all, as he would only be reviled for it. This so-called progress of man towards a better state of things was a sluggish affair. So much so, indeed, that one

was bound to lose interest in it all after watching it for a while.

Stalybrass got very excited and called upon us all to say that we thought this was a shocking statement to make, but even Hitchcock would not back him up in this. He didn't mind telling us that owing to his great wealth he had had many opportunities of doing things for people—and the people—and he was thoroughly disheartened and disgusted and had decided to do nothing in future. He hadn't been a rich man long before he made a horrible discovery, which was that if one set out ready to share what one had with others, they took what you gave them as a matter of course and never said thank you; and not only that, but tried to drag every mortal thing you had from you and leave you with nothing at all. Now he didn't care how his money accumulated. He'd leave his heirs to struggle with it, and become disillusioned in their turn. Looking at it from one point of view he supposed it was a good thing that before he became hardened he had already given away vast sums of money. It was paradoxical that it should do so, but the thought of this did give him satisfaction, somehow.

Dear Old Hitch. His talk about not giving any more money away did not tally with the fact that I had seen him and Celia and Miss Mac. poring over the plans for a big children's hospital somewhere. But then children are not really human beings and therefore I don't suppose they came within the scope of his disillusionment.

Stalybrass quite exploded with wrath. He would not sit by and hear such things said about the PEOPLE! and there was not proper justification for saying that all the finest and most public-spirited Greeks had been foully done to death or banished. What about Solon? And hadn't Pericles died in his bed or whatever the Greek equivalent was for a bed in those days?

"Pericles' death saved his life, so to speak. If he had lived a few weeks longer the people would have had

his blood for a ducat, for he was a very great man. And Solon was so old a man that he wasn't worth the killing!" The P.M. was really bent on getting at Stalybrass that day.

To hark back, he said, the only great men who had not perished miserably or in exile were Cleisthenes and Solon and both of these men were quite as cute as foxes. They both bribed the Delphic oracle to help them and to crack up their leadership and enterprises. He didn't blame them. He thought they were fully justified in trading on the foolishness of the people. On mature consideration he gave it as his fully weighed opinion that a state founded on the vanities and superstitions of mankind stood a better chance of flourishing than one based on their higher feelings. Men's higher feelings were inclined to flicker and waver and even go out in a breath of ridicule, whereas their bad instincts persisted curiously and were strongly and deeply rooted.

Stalybrass was almost speechless, but he managed to pant out—"Do you mean to tell me that you would advocate the stooping to such means nowadays as to play on the people's weaknesses?!!"

"Yes," answered the P.M. blandly, looking round as if for confirmation, but in reality to wink at us all. "I really believe one can only succeed by pandering to people's follies. I think, for instance, if we could install a good reliable counterpart of the Delphic oracle in a little temple built for the purpose in Parliament Square —or better still in the Office of Works building, which would be loftier and more commodious—we would find it most useful. People are just as stupid and just as superstitious as ever they were in the days of the Delphic High Priestess!"

Here the prince with his customary courtesy and tact, the result of many years of Court life, gently led Stalybrass away, whose neck by now must have measured at least thirty inches. He was seriously upset by the P.M.'s words, and never in the world would

have guessed he was only joking and pulling one of his trestle legs!

As they walked off together we could hear him denouncing such doctrines furiously, stuttering and declaiming. The prince nodded his head urbanely, but I know he didn't understand a word of what was being said to him, for though he knew a lot of English, I'm sure he didn't know enough to understand it when it was spoken in rag-time at double speed with a splutter of indignation in addition.

We had a good laugh when Stalybrass' back was turned. It was really great to hear him laying down the law off-hand to a man of such intelligence, and education, and wisdom, ripened by so much experience, as the P.M., a man who for years had held a great party together in many times of crisis.

"Poor Stalybrass, I really like him you know. He's as honest as daylight but so terribly downright. The dear fellow doesn't understand that one should follow the nap of life as it were—not be going constantly against it. It does no good. A great mistake."

"I'm glad you ragged him a bit to-day. It will do him good. I wonder you let him have his own way about things so much and talk you down. You know that if it came to a debate you could knock him into a cocked hat!"

The P.M., who as you may observe had almost recovered his voice completely, shrugged his shoulders whimsically. "No! why should I bother to argue with him or point out his mistakes? It would be waste of time, for you may be quite sure that when a man holds opinions as violently as he does, sooner or later he is bound to change them."

We slowly got up and shook our legs and descended to the hill-side amphitheatre dedicated to Dionysius, the benefactor of mankind, giver, not merely of wine, but of the fruitfulness of trees of all kinds and of the joyousness of spring growth and autumn vintages; whose special duty it is to ripen the figs and cause the grapes to swell

and sweeten. His job can be no sinecure in view of the manner in which they flourish in Greece. Selecting at random a few out of the twenty-five thousand seats at our disposal, we sat down in them and tried to picture it as it must have been when it was packed for a first night, or as would have been the case, a first morning, seeing that the dramatic representations of the tragedies took place upon the three festivals of the god Dionysius, and lasted the whole day, culminating in the awarding of the prize to the poet whose plays were judged to be the best, amidst the cheers and acclamations of the Athenian public, who must have been something worn-out and sun-baked after witnessing two or perhaps three trilogies, each one containing four separate playlets packed with tragic incidents and harrowing situations. We remembered that Euripides gained a prize at one of those festivals and that the award was fully approved by at least one of his fellow-dramatists, Sophocles, who let fall the remark, preserved and handed down by Aristotle, that he depicted men, not as they ought to be, but as they were. And talking of Socrates we discussed the affairs of his arraignment before the Phratores on the evidence of his relations who had accused him of not being able to manage his own or his children's affairs and how he took up one of the plays he had but lately written, the *Œdipus in Colonus*, and read from it passages which so impressed them that they dismissed the accusation at once. Family life, says Rankin, must have been pretty much then as it is now.

The marble arm-chairs curved to put a tired back at ease were exquisitely comfortable; the afternoon advanced and still we talked, our conversation drifting around the writers of the plays witnessed there in those far-off days, and around the plays themselves, many of which had served the double purpose of amusement and instruction, in that they were commentaries, and very biting too, on certain abuses in the civic administration of Athens; besides other abuses of sorts. Still later

and when it became cooler, we walked to the Areopagus and, climbing the steps cut in its sides, looked around; and from that on to the Pnyx, repeopling it with all its thronging citizens. We passed the political Agora, where Pericles used to convene his supporters, a momentous assembly, to decide world matters and deliver his glowing orations, which so biased their minds to him; where the demagogues sowed the seeds of sedition and glory, according to circumstances. The noble portico of the Agora still stands, with mute and unconscious irony inviting one to enter by it into a piece of bare unenclosed space.

We stood under the Bema, a platform looking out to sea, to which Demosthenes had so often ascended to speak to the crowd.

Now all is deserted and abandoned. The lizards sun themselves on the rocks and catch little unwary Greek flies and the tettix chirps with a shrill dry note where once that great voice made itself heard, beseeching the Athenians to protect their country from the assaults of Philip the Macedonian.

It appalled me to see its desertion and solitude, for it was empty with an emptiness that was worse than if it had never been occupied. It was heartrending to remember the weight and multitude of matters once done there; the sum and pitch of thoughts that were thought and declared and analysed there thirty-six or more centuries before the day on which we saw it. Thoughts, which if they had not been recorded, or the records had not reached us, would have left us, of our century, hundreds of years behind our present stand; thoughts by which we had been given light and on which we had been able to found ourselves and from which by the grace of Heaven we might be able to go forward one day. Such a web of enterprises, literary, artistic, philosophical and commercial as was spun here. A piece of cloth from which a garment might have been cut and sewn to keep the whole world warm, if things had only been different.

And then, musing and wondering, up again to the mighty Parthenon to watch the setting sun fill all the sky with greatness. His declining rays threw the shadows of the mighty columns inwards along the level paving. The city lay below bathed in a golden evening mystery. Many things which by the common light of day might have appeared mean or drab, took on the lines and shades of perfect beauty.

From the heights of the Acropolis we had marked a broad belt of luscious green starting from Mount Pentelicius and sweeping right away to the distant Piræus. It was the plain of the Kephissus and the olive groves we saw were the olive groves of Academe, the same which had sheltered the Academy of Plato. We looked at them and wondered if the Altar of Love still stood at the door and the little Temple of Prometheus and all the statues to the Graces. The trees were too thick to reveal their only too probable absence and dispel the illusion, so we toyed with it awhile. As is the case with the Lyceum, these are the descendants of the very olive-trees in whose studious shades Aristotle, Leontius and Epicurus spent whole days listening to Plato's ideas and submitting their own to him, not marking the passing of the hours, nor counting any of their moments lost. Here came Socrates of the crooked mouth, whose old brow was perpetually wrinkled by his inquiring thoughts and self-questionings; and Aspasia too, to converse, who was a clever woman according to the standard prevailing there. We have a few records of her, but it is known that she was dissatisfied with the position held by her follow-women then, and talked over the matter with the wise greyheads who forgathered here. I could almost have imagined I saw her returning at nightfall, in her gorgeous litter, along the winding highroad, accompanied by her attendants dressed more splendidly than she herself.

On exploring these groves later, though we would

soon be deep in summer-time, we found the Kephissus (so often dry by June) gently swollen to the lip of all its various banks. The edges of its wandering arms were lined with sedgy marsh plants and giant reeds and in quiet side pools bright fish swam lazily. The ouzel and the kingfisher were everywhere, evading us with quick movements as we passed. We often loitered in the solitude and coolness to escape from the glare and the too abundant classic dust that blows from all the dry ways of the town. The woods are so wide and so long that in the darkly shadowed alleys of their depths one seemed to recall the greenness and quietness of some unbroken dream of childhood. In the farthermost parts the growth is so close, the boughs so dense above the head that from the beginning to the end of the year no light worth calling by the name penetrates there and during their season the nightingales sing continuously in a prolonged dim-green twilight without ever knowing when night changes to morning—or the other way about.

There had been a universal and therefore openly expressed wish on the part of most of us to go to some of the wilder and more remote parts of Elis and Achaia and so forth, so an excursion was quickly planned. The Dorian party, as they called themselves, were particularly anxious to visit the scene of the Olympian games, to get a mental picture of an interesting aspect of the ancient civilisation and life; also to see something of the recent excavations around the colossal structure that had been once raised there in honour of Zeus, and where we could get a sight, almost *in situ*, of that pearl of all pearls, the Hermes of Praxiteles. We therefore took train to Patras, and from Patras on to Elis. The journey was hot and tiring, lasted many weary hours, and was not one of the pleasantest experiences of our trip. To begin with the stations are so ill managed, that to book one's ticket and to obtain advice as to which train goes where, one has to take a part in what is really something more like a football

scrimmage than anything else. After all we found ourselves in a couple of imperfectly constructed, badly ventilated, insufficiently cushioned and cleansed carriages proceeding along an improperly laid railway line. With flies, airlessness and heat, leg-cramp and general tedium, the usual discussions became acute and acrimonious, and everyone wondered why on earth anyone had ever left England. The only two people who did not get ruffled were the P.M. and Rankin, and their training in the House and in their constituencies had been so hard that it was, I fancy, a physical impossibility for either of them to lose his temper.

It was not so bad when we got to Elis ; indeed it was not bad at all, for the drive along the coast along the side of the limpid waters of the bay was really delightful and as we approached Pyrgos the airs that drifted to us were indescribably sweet and heavy with the perfume of orange blossom, blown over from the wayside orchards, fenced with aloes.

The road thence to Olympia was practically finished and lay through the loveliest wild country imaginable. It was the route proper, almost actually the same as that followed by the crowds of sightseers or those who came from the West to witness, or participate in, the classic contests. At first it wandered among the meadows bright with the tall young corn, with outlying slopes beyond, thick clustered with various growths ; mastich and arbutus, or great clumps of purple judas-tree, and late white pear.

At every pace we took, from the wayside banks came countless grateful odours of pungent flowering shrubs. The farther along we went the wilder and the stonier the prospect became. Amphitheatre after amphitheatre opened before us as we passed through the narrow mountain glens and defiles ; and each one as we saw it we thought must be at last the sacred precincts, the Artis itself, by the confluence of the Kladeos,

in whose valley the great gathering used to be held, only to find that it was farther on. Those of us on horses were sometimes tempted to leave the carriage track, ascending above it on to little straggling paths on the sides of the wooded ravines and there met many mountain rivulets at the bottom, flowing rapidly in deep cuttings ; rushing to join the main river, flooding it so full that we had difficulty in fording it on our horses.

The anticipation was better than the realisation, as it turned out, for on arriving at Olympia we found it utterly disillusioning. We all said " Ah-h " in various tones of regret and dismay. It could not of course be helped nor should we have expected otherwise, but that these explorations which were being watched closely by all the savants of the world—reading about them—studying photographs of them—or coming in person to view them—would cause a lot of apparent damage ; and could not possibly be conducted without a great mass and accumulation of tools, litter and unsightly paraphernalia of all sorts. So that as we saw it then, it looked far more like a large garden city in the making than anything else, and gave us a *coup d'œil* such as one might have got in any large suburb in spring outside a growing town, but very much worse as the operations were on a larger scale. There were hundreds of workmen employed and all the drab accompaniments of their jobs littered about, bits of board and tarpaulin, water-pumping apparatus, wheelbarrows, old sacks and the like. The vegetation was trampled down and the ground was nothing but a great expanse of bare, trodden ugly earth with here and there a mound left which had been cast up by the digging—and a few occasional holes filling slowly with yellow turgid water.

It was certainly a shock to us, but after a while we got used to it. We were most kindly looked after by some of the archæologists there, to whom Hitchcock had obtained introductions, and so got invitations from them for us all to put up with them. We were very comfortable that way, and not only that, but we were

soon informed as to what the latest digging had brought forth in the way of new discoveries or old ones rediscovered and plunged into the matter with a fresh outburst of the interest we had felt at first on finding ourselves among the wonderful things at Athens. Thanks, too, to Hitchcock's far-sightedness we had been careful not to get letters to any of the "smart set" resident in Greece, for, as he reminded us, smart people don't think it's the right thing to show an interest in any remarkable things or remains of antiquity, and if we had got mixed up in the Society of the place we'd have been willy-nilly obliged to play bridge and gossip all day, and if we wanted to see anything, sneak out after nightfall and go round them with a candle or a dark lantern. He had made the mistake of getting into the "right set" in Egypt, he said, and after entertaining and being entertained by them, he and Miss Sadie were ostracised because in the face of their opposition they had outraged their feelings by behaving like common tourists and going to see the Sphinx. It was worse still at Luxor, for they were seen entering the Tombs of the Kings in broad daylight, to see Amenhotep the Second, who had reigned three thousand, three hundred and sixty-five years ago, and who now lay in his glass coffin deep in the heart of the mountain, and his little favourite slave with the curly hair near by. By so doing they lost caste entirely, and caused a convulsion of horror to run through the colony.

If we had all been very high in the Peerage, it wouldn't have mattered, and our desire to instruct ourselves would have been put down to a quaint and becoming eccentricity. But he was only an American millionaire and couldn't afford to do it, except incog.

It meant very close attention if one were to make head or tail of what one saw at Olympia, or keep step with what the experts told us. One had, after conning them very carefully, to keep so much of the plans in one's head, if one wanted to get any conception of what

these great temples had once looked like, for the earthquakes had brought nearly everything toppling down and scattered the big pillars to such a distance, that some of them lay twenty-five yards from where they were originally erected. But we threw ourselves into it with vigour, catching enthusiasm from the jolly old boys who were directing operations and who were only too eager to post us. The conversation of the party ceased to be partisan and the discussion shifted from political to architectural subjects instead. We painstakingly measured out the marks upon the ground and argued gravely as to whether they were the foundations of buildings to be classed as Tetrastyle, Hexastyle, Octastyle or Decastyle, and whether, above all, they were Hypo-Theatral. We searched, and I think, found, from time to time, the portion known as the Opisthodomos or back building; or again, the Posticum, and haggled horribly as to whether a certain piece of ground about as big as a London back garden, were the Pronaos where the famous Chryselephantine statue of Zeus by Pheidias once stood, raised upon a pedestal.

The ladies, whose tongues were more developed than those of the men, talked away among themselves. One heard them debating whether things were Peripetereal or Diptereal, or else Pseudo-Diptereal, and whether one should refer to the top step of a Peripetereal temple as Stylobate, or whether this name was only accorded to all three of them together. A slight undercurrent of partisanship again cropped up because someone declared the Dorian capitals with their circular moulded caps under a square abacus to be in far better taste than the Ionic capitals which have a spiral volute at each angle under a moulded abacus. Dan said coldly the latter were "too ornate" and therefore "bad Art" and would never be tolerated at Poughkeepsie. But on the whole the arguments flagged and withered away, as one can't, in hot blood, lay one's hands upon architectural terms easily.

Lady Shaw sat on a heap of sun-baked stones and

sucked beef-tea lozenges, enjoying the air and saying "Now, now," to us at intervals, if she thought we were getting heated.

The P.M. and Rankin spent their days on their knees crouching down deciphering inscriptions on votive tablets stacked in dark little outhouses, and smudged themselves and their faces over, and got slight attacks of housemaid's knee. Stalybrass talked with some of the workmen and was delighted to find, through one of them who spoke broken English, that they were underpaid and seething with discontent.

One's imagination as well as one's tongue went on crutches after a bit. The enthusiasm of the experts in charge was immense, also I think their self-confidence was immense too. They were so expert that from one glance at a handful of rubble they would reconstruct a whole temple to Zeus, or Jupiter, or Aphrodite, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Far be it from me to question any of their pronouncements, but some of them were sweeping. For instance, Herr Something-or-other, I forget his name, showed me a photograph of a model group, heroic size, which had been restored from inferences and conclusions drawn by him from fragments he had found. The group represented the wife of King Pirithous being carried off against her will by two centaurs, whilst her husband with an expression of agony on his face tried to prevent them. I was much impressed by it—especially by the expression on the face of the queen, and asked to see the fragments. There were only about three pieces, the largest of which was about the side of a middling Dutch cheese (which had been eaten into at that), and which came, he said, from the lady's torso, somewhere about where her floating rib had been, or even possibly the small of her back. I thought it subtle work on his part to have reconstructed these four figures from the material at his disposal and, above all, to have divined from the Dutch cheese fragment the reluctance on her face and the agony on that of her husband. However he concluded

that there were any centaurs there, was beyond me, for what they had to go by seemed to be like nothing so much as the ordinary rubbish of a builder's yard. He said the group came from the eastern pediment of the principal temple there.

The more energetic amongst us—and this included Celia and Miss Sadie—thought that part of our return journey should be made on mules across the mountain passes of Eurymanthus, and to that end we had made inquiries and hired the services of some of these beasts, with their brilliant, striped saddle blankets and their still more brilliant attendants, who were attired in full Palicar costume, fustinella of purest white, embroidered jacket with white sleeves, scarlet skull-cap and bright blue pendent tassel, complete with a manner that was princely and sparklingly loquacious.

On the day of our departure, having shouted our good-byes to the sleepy-heads, we started off full of high morning enthusiasm in an air as clear as a well-cut jewel. The birds were singing madly on all sides about us, so that not a part of our surroundings was free of this universal melody. The nightingale still outsang the others just because he was unable to hold back the music that choked his little bosom. At first we rode along the plain amongst green fields and a few stray cultivated homesteads. along a road which would bring us to the sloping bases of the chain for which we made. The softly ascending tracts were loosely chequered with woodland and vegetation, and Summer before so very long would have established herself in the valley, for already all the trees in the wayside thickets, great planes, myrtles and laurels had shot out their tufts of leaves, still pale green and delicate of texture from their long winter confinement. Ahead of us the wide outlying fertile meadow reaches were starred and starred again with daffodils, narcissi and forget-me-nots, and tall violets and anemones of every colour, pale blue, deep pink, deep crimson and showy scarlet ; for these gaudy innocents of the spring that massed themselves,

now here now there in lovely formless drifts, in their simple pride carried off colours more truly suited to a courtesan's guilty wear. The dew lay over all the herbage like inexpressibly fine-woven muslins spread by fairies on the grasses. Here and there, along the road, or in the hollows, clung a few maidenly delicate mists ready to blush themselves away as the sun grew warmer. By terraced traverses and upland slants, and a sudden descent again, we reached the stony terraced bed of the Alpheus and to Miss Sadie, riding beside me, I repeated :

" Arethusa arose
From her couch of snows
In the Acrocerannian mountains—
From cloud and from crag,
With many a jag,
Shepherding her bright fountains.
She leapt down the rocks,
With her rainbow locks
Streaming among the streams :—
Her steps paved with green
The downward ravine
Which slopes to the western gleams ;
And gliding and springing
She went, ever singing,
In murmurs as soft as sleep ;
The earth seemed to love her,
And heaven smiled above her,
As she lingered towards the deep.

Then Alpheus bold,
On his glacier cold,
With his trident the mountains strook
And opened a chasm
In the rocks ;—with the spasm
All Erymanthus shook.
And the black south wind
It concealed behind
The urns of the silent snow.
And earthquake and thunder
Did rend in sunder
The bars of the spring below.
The beard and the hair
Of the river god were

Seen through the torrent's sweep,
As he followed the light
Of the fleet nymph's flight
To the brink of the Dorian deep."

This river was a favourite of hers and we followed its winding for a space as it tore and tumbled, sometimes near it and sometimes high above it, putting our mules up the rocky projections which, by throwing themselves across his way, had forced him to change his course and delay his pursuit by taking a great sweep aside; or urging them across the pell-mell tributary rivulets which had made deep torrent beds for themselves, as they hurried their cold drops from the distant rocky spurs where they had first gathered as snowflakes.

The way grew suddenly steeper and more and more remote, and after many hours of climbing we came upon an old Turkish fort. During all our faring to it and in all the miles we had covered, we had met only one human creature, a shepherd of the lower slopes guarding his pale buff flocks in the soft diffused morning light, with a staff in his hand and a far-away look in his quiet young face. The utter desertion of the vales of Greece, and of the ruined places near which our tracks had wound, and which we had seen on different occasions during our sojourn there, was beyond describing and could not have been more complete during the days that preceded the creation of Man. What we saw was beautiful as it was desolate, desolate as it was beautiful.

The fort was on a point which overlooked a vast ganglia of mountain systems and confused ridges, with jagged rollers piled high one on another, and barren heights dissolving into gloomy dells and reuniting again into uprushing beetling crags and prominences, constituting the divisions of the different countries between which in the far-off past some of the great classic battles had taken place, and whose rocky shelves had witnessed hand-to-hand fights and bitter struggles.

We unslung our panniers, for the sun was high, and breakfasted.

And then from there the way grew still more steep, and if possible still more solitary of aspect and more straggling and unexpectedly interrupted with many turnings to right and left ; and suddenly and without almost any warning, we left the hot calm sky behind, as we plunged into the obscurity of an age-old forest of oaks, finding ourselves in strange weary vistas of ashen-grey boles, and in the semi-darkness that they cast. We came upon it in such an unforeseen way and in its weirdness it was so unike anything we had yet seen in Greece that we uttered exclamations of surprise and dismay. And yet wasn't it what one should expect to find in so old a country, whose great past is so far back and completely finished that it doesn't link up in the least with its present or future, or even possible or problematical future, in the smallest matter. Where effort has staled and where the sap of the national spirit no longer rises as it should.

In answer to our questioning surprise the guides told us how these exhausted trees had been left there undisturbed for centuries, because of the dark superstitions that had woven themselves about them, and because of the poisonous snakes that slept deep down in the thick layers of dead leaves about their stems. No one ever visited them or made use of their strange distorted branches. There the oaks stood, with their contorted ashy limbs, in an ancient and hoary repose, as if a curse had been laid on them causing them to be struck motionless in the act of their ghoul-like writhings ; as still as if a spell of enchantment had been laid on the entire forest, the Lord only knows how long ago, and never again would be lifted, and thus their awful decay perpetuated. We seemed to ride for hours and yet never be able to get away from their grey-encircling gloom, and though the snakes would not awaken yet, it gave us a horror to think of them lying coiled below us there, as the mules plunged their hooves in the crackling, snapping dryness. Yet even here, in these grey and gruesome alleys, we found a few pale flesh-pink

anemones and deepest crimson, comparing oddly with the aged appearance of the withered boughs, where a dull silver-green lichen was creeping and covering their shrivelled skins.

It was fitting that when we at last escaped from these creepy glades, the sun should have hidden itself and the weather changed from splendid warmth and brightness to dullness; and that the beginnings of a cold air should come to meet us round the windings of the glens. We rode on, now up, now down, meeting great tortoises, occasionally vultures too, and at every fresh step of the way a melancholy seemed to settle down on us all, as if the forest had cast something over us that was not easy to shake off or get away from. As the afternoon began to draw to its end, the desolation that we felt lay all around us was appalling. Earlier in the day, the mountains had been a warm rich purple-blue; now they looked a dismal disheartening black. Their immense projecting sides and dizzy pinnacles seemed to have been torn apart by giants in their anger. I shivered when I thought of what a cold tale the winter's wind could tell, as it came whistling round and down through these bleak gorges, changing to a cavernous roaring when it blew louder. These mountains seemed like sullen exiles, far removed from the warm and friendly company of men, and seemed to view us sternly, closing in about us and towering darkly and malevolently above as as we plodded down below, on the loose-stoned paths at the foot of their chasms. We were more than glad to reach the insect-infested khan which gave us shelter that night.

After some hours of broken fitful sleep, due to the said insects, the extent of whose voracious welcome I leave you to guess, we hurried off early, not wishing to have the spectral twilight come down on us again in those lone mountain halls, but rather to try to make our next night's shelter in better time. A great forlorn city in a valley was sighted by midday. We reined

up, and looking down on it saw that the people who had tenanted it must have got up and left it many a hundred years agone, and saddened at what we saw, we moved on slowly.

We were of two minds as to whether we would turn up and explore another tortuous glen, which the guides said led to an eyrie nest of refuge used by Greeks flying from the persecution of the Turks in their last war; but we thought of the time required and didn't go.

After going forward some distance beyond it, our surprise was considerable to find that we had come to an end of our journey. At any rate, so it seemed. We were in a place which was an impassable cul-de-sac, unless we turned back and went out as we had come in. We sat there blankly, Indian file, looking at the perpendicular walls of rock which surrounded us on all sides. We uneasily wondered whether our muleteers were bandits in disguise; whether to have engaged them on their gay good looks and obliging merry manners, without obtaining careful references as to their honesty, had been the crowning mistake of lives which were about to come to a summary conclusion in that long quiet pass. But no! We had not misplaced our trust, for of a sudden, giving the word to the others to follow, the leader dismounted and turning sharply disappeared into a narrow strip of pine-trees. We followed and led our beasts, with infinite pains and precautions, up a zig-zag path, of a steepness the which I had never seen the like before.

When we emerged from the pines, we perceived with delight that we were surrounded by Alpine crests and the air was so cool that as we drew it in it felt like a draught of cold clear water. There were belts of green on them lower down, but even up to their dazzling patches of drifted snow the vernal spring had come, and we saw, all ablow and ablaze in them, the crocus and the cyclamen, and deep blue scilla; Nature in her mysterious way had decreed that from cold should come

warmth, and that instead of chilling and killing them the bitter fleeciness of that white covering should give protection to the little flowers and help to nurse and save them through the winter.

For the rest of the way, the scenery was much as the day before, not so big, not so varied, and I made no notes. The evening found us at Patras.

Our journeying through those wild passes had lasted in all close on three days. The latter part of the third one brought us to our destination, a most lovely place, commanding a noble view across the narrow ford of Missolonghi, where Byron lies buried.

During our passage across these Alps, we had a glimpse of Arcadia and found to our surprise that its lands were bare and barren, quite unlike the pied meads and dales of our imaginings.

After we got back to Athens, I had a great piece of luck, which I attributed to my having carelessly gathered a few handfuls of wild flowers and as carelessly laid them on the broken altar of some little unknown goddess come upon on some hill-side in our wanderings. In answer to my importunities, Celia consented to the spending of a whole day with me away from the others, leaving them to pursue any plans they thought fit.

To make the day as long as possible and as we had got used to the shortening of our sleeping-time, we got up, borrowed the yacht's dinghy, stowed our provender on board in a basket, and were off on the waters not much more than an hour after dawn. I had decided how this picnic for two was to be spent, for Celia had said, upon my asking her, that she thought it would be nice to be taken right off, she didn't care when, as long as she didn't know where, until she found herself there ; that it would be altogether delightful, after so many plannings for other people on her part, to let someone else take charge of her for a change.

I think the world and everything in it goes to sleep

just as we do ourselves, at night, so that those early hours have some touching quality about them ; as if, during their passing, a feeling of confidence might be established between the earth and us. It is quiescent and not yet quite awake nor on the watch as it will be during the later hours. Just now we felt this strongly, having it quite to ourselves.

The spot to which I now rowed Celia surged with a mass of suggestive memories all as closely relevant to the story of Athens' greatness as anything could be, and literally (and I knew this would interest her), the scenes of the occurrences could be placed to within a few feet and made to pass before her eyes, so definite is the information handed down by the writers, so completely do the testimonies written by so many different scholars agree and point to certain places and things.

We had not been out on the waters above three quarters of an hour, the dinghy bobbing like a cork on the sea ripples, and here after a few moments' more pulling we would be in the very place where the Persian hosts had suffered utter defeat, hounded out of Greece, and sent packing to their native country by the Athenians, acting under the instructions of Themistocles. A few more strokes of the oar and we would pass under the rocky brow of the mainland, gazing down on the island of Salamis, rising and forming straits so narrow that a stone could almost be thrown across them ; the very straits where the triremes that fought in the battle of Salamis had struggled and crashed and jammed together. Somewhere on that very rock, it was positively known that Xerexs the son of Darius sat, and you can almost swear to a place which would have accommodated his throne, placed there so that he could watch the proceedings, and that the secretaries brought by him should " write down particulars of the action." This phrase is according to Phanodemus and quoted by Plutarch. It also would have allowed reasonable room space for the great people he had about him ; the kings of Sidon and of Tyre and their respec-

tive bodyguards, cuirassed and helmeted. Some say his throne was of gold, others say of silver. He must have looked down confidently to where his own swarming ships manœuvred near Phalernum—one thousand, two hundred galleys of war and two thousand transports—and then at the little Athenian fleet in the small bay of Salamis, which, small as it was, was more than big enough to hold them, in view of their pitifully small number. The shores must have been alive with people and the litter of a great camp. With " seven hundred thousand foot and four hundred thousand horse," his courtiers and their retinues of women and servants—not including the Egyptians and persons posted on outlying stands, to cut off his enemies' retreat, or counting those on the promontory—Xerxes must have numbered five and a half million followers in his train. It was so easy to wish them all back there and see them with their flying cloaks and regal draperies, in all the splendour of the great Asiatic princes who would stand behind the chair of such a great king. And yet in spite of their splendour he can't have had very good advice from those who were at his elbow and helped him with their words, for by nightfull of that same day his armies were scattered, routed and confounded, and his whole fleet rammed and burnt, and he himself fled in a panic.

I drew on my imagination to recast for Celia some of the things that had happened there that day. The precipitate movements, the organised advances, the running about, the crowds that gathered suddenly to watch the fortunes of the affray, and dispersed as suddenly, to take part themselves. The messengers who brought bad news, those who brought good. The leaders, the priests, the soldiers, the people all in confused masses ; opening up to make way, closing up in a pack ; tents, horses, camels, slaves, blacks, oxen, women, dogs, mules and all the lot.

Now the place is empty with a strange emptiness, and a desolation only equalled by that of the lone mountains of Erymanthus. It is silent with the silence

that pervades those places which have once been busy and noisy with men. The sort of silence that one keeps in mind afterwards, because it almost had a substance to it. There is nothing there but the eagle now. As we drifted by, we came on one. For a brief moment he rested the golden cruelty of his wide gaze on us and then got up with powerful strokes of his loose, great wings. Wild heir and undisputed tenant of all the rocks of Greece and the miles upon miles of blue space above them, he vanished over the hills. I stopped pulling, letting the boat go with the current, and wondered, Would if be possible, if I listened very carefully, very attentively, to hear some faint echo of the trumpet calls that were issued to the brave Athenians on that morning so long, so very long ago, when the light was still horizontal in the skies and the coolness of the dawn chilled the men's blood and gave them pause in the moments before going into action?

I leant upon my oars and listened. Hark!

Ta-ran-ta-ra. Ta-ran-ta-ra.

Surely there it was, faint and far away, but there all the same. I listened again:

Ta-ran-ta-ra. Ta-ran-ta-ra.

Yes, and again:

Ta-ran-ta-ra-ra-ra. Ta-ran-ta-ra-ra-ra.

How it must have stirred them! I seemed to hear it, awaking again, with its brazen, tongueless clarity, from the high cold rocks about me. And mingling with it a sound as of the distant drub of drums, to rouse them to their campaigning. But no! I was mistaken. It was only the silence singing in my ears, and the pulses beating in my own head.

I rowed on and listened no more, for if the echo of the trumpets could reach us, so too might an echo of the shouts, curses and cries of the wounded soldiers.

After some fast pulling we got into the broad bay of Eleusis and ahead of us there lay the little village of that name, picturesque with its scattered ruins of the Temple of Demeter and the Propylæ. Beyond were the broad lands, supposedly the home of Ceres. goddess of plenty, and where Triptolemus first taught agriculture. The ruins of another great city lay about us and we picked our way along a white marble pavement, catching our feet in the old wheel ruts, walking between great pieces of overthrown columns of magnificent Pentelic marble. There was one big alto-relievo, carved to represent soldiers in full armour, that a hundred men could scarcely have moved between them. Behind us was the Via Sacra and the Pass of Daphne, through which it wound, and through which the great possession of the Mysteries used to come. Priests and white virgins and children garlanded and scattering flowers were guarded all the way by the bold Spearmen of Alcibiades in glinting armour and all the citizens of Athens came following after.

Some of the villagers, most likely blood relations of some of those who had taken a part in these celebrations of the past, on spying us out, came to us, civil and agreeable, but very curious at seeing Celia. And when she lifted her chiffon veil, there was a general exclamation of approval at the fairness of her complexion.

We laughed heartily at them.

I can hardly record the pleasure it gave me to have Celia to myself like this, and to roam with her in such new and wonderful places. Thanks to that little supersensitive installation we all have in our brains, and through which the most delightful finesses of intercourse can be sustained, I knew that it also gave her pleasure. How much, of course, I could not judge, but no matter how small the amount, it was valuable to me. I held her hat while she drank of the fountain of Proserpine, a pure gush of water, whence according to the legend of mythology, the ravished daughter of Ceres emerges from the infernal regions to visit her mother sometimes.

On our return, we paid a tribute to the memory of good old Themistocles, whose common-sense, and a certain piece of inspired dishonesty, saved the day for the Grecians at the battle of Salamis.

They had this much gratitude, that after banishing him in his declining years, they brought back his old bones from abroad and erected a monument to him in honour of his victories. They hollowed him out a grave in a rocky promontory within sound of the waters that had floated his conquering galleys. He wouldn't have asked for a better place. But though he has slept there in peace this many a day, now, the waves with their ceaseless thrusting and withdrawing and gobble-gobbling, at the point of the rock, have eaten it away and pour into the tomb and gulp greedily around his stone sarcophagus, and in time will get the poor old hero himself, no doubt. The salt lies in thick crusts everywhere and we scraped some off like sea-snow. We said good-bye to him, turning the dinghy towards the harbour, for before it became too late, there was one other good-bye we wished to make to a mutual friend we had made in Athens. One day, when the sun had poured down with almost unbearable strength on the Acropolis, Celia and I had taken refuge in one of the museums for a rest and a spell of coolness. Strolling along its dusty, shady corridors, amongst all the statues of strained discobolus throwers and archaic figures, we came upon a solitary fragment, a sad, sweet lady, modelled in perfect truth, I'll swear, for the work was beyond reproach. Only the lovely head remained, half turned upon the shattered neck. There was some wistful setting of the eyes as she gazed at us, some look in her face as of listening to an inner voice, that held us both before her in wondering silence. The sculptor must have seen the look, for he never would have thought to put it there otherwise, nor could he have possibly chiselled it without the guidance of her face. Her full fine lips seemed to appeal mutely from the marble, as if she asked or tried to tell us something,

and there was a whole eternity of singing and dreaming in her expression.

"Oh!" said Celia, "how lovely."

It was. I have never seen anything so perfectly touching or noble as that woman's face. There was a kind of sweet beseechingness, a sad radiance, a compassion about it, impossible to describe. It had every emotion in it that could beautify a face. The name was cut deeply on a small portion of the base that lay beside her. The portrait must surely have been sculptured for the island garden of some good friend and by rights should have been set to look along a vista of feathered green tamarisks, framing a glimpse of blue sea depths. I could imagine it so, with a sheltering citron grove behind, and a cypress spire or two, to give it point.

Poor Poetess! Poor violet-crowned, spotless, sweetly-smiling lady, as Alcæus her fellow-poet addressed her. So maligned by the historians that not all the many proofs that crop up from time to time to show that their censures were undeserved can clear her; so smirched, that all the waters of the Ægean Sea cannot wash her white again.

As I say, we paid her a farewell visit in her dusty prison that evening.

The time had slipped by during our stay, in the most amazing way, for sunny days run past so quickly that positively one cannot mark their going. The date of our departure had been postponed not once, but many times. Each time the skipper got sulkier about it and lodged a complaint. I admired Hitchcock because of the way he refused to let him have his own way. If the yacht had been mine, I'm positive I'd have obeyed the skipper, and in that I feel I differ from the Americans. If they own a thing, they own it. If a man is boss, he is boss. So many of my own rich friends are so bullied and browbeaten by their depend-

ents and employees, that I've decided a travelling tinker knows less of slavery and more of liberty than they do ; cooks, gardeners, chauffeurs, grooms, valets, secretaries, cluster round them and impose on them, till they almost lose sight of their own identities and rights in trying to decide justly between the claims of these importunists. But not so Hitchcock. Talking to me about the matter of the skipper wanting his own way, he gave me his views on such things and how a man should manage so that his underlings won't swamp him and steal his life from him altogether. "I pay them well, I treat them well, but their work is there, and let them do it properly. If they don't do it properly, I'll get someone else to do it, and if I can't get someone else to do it, I'll do it myself. If I can't do it myself, I'll do without it. Millionaire though I am, I can do with less than they can. I am used to hardship, for I've trained myself to it and never let myself get out of training. No one will master me. That's the secret of my life. Whether it is my house or my play or my work. As for my works, I keep an eye on them and the moment a man becomes indispensable, his position becomes precarious, for it means he is trying to climb over his pals. I want good team work and none of that nonsense. I'll take no wooden money from anyone. As I say, I like to be friends with people, do any mortal thing that lies in my power to make them happy and regard them as friends, but they must do as much for me. Do you see that ruined temple up there?" We were standing on the deck of the yacht as he spoke and he waved his green cigar towards the Parthenon. I assented. "Well, that puts me in mind of Samson, and Samson puts me in mind of myself. Somebody annoyed him, and he put his big arms around the mighty pillars and brought the whole darned temple crashing down about his ears. He was killed of course. But he was quite happy. Like me, he didn't mind being crushed to death himself, as long as he knew his enemies would be crushed too."

Naturally we sailed upon the date of his choosing.

Hereabouts I think it would be necessary for me to make a few remarks about the telling of my little story. To the reader, it must seem ill-constructed and wandering and pointless. The reason is this, that up to the moment ol leaving Athens, I had kept these few odd notes and diary scribblings from day to day, perhaps recording things a few hours after I'd heard them or seen them, or again not till a few days after ; and I am too lazy, nor do I think it worth while, to rewrite them. I've added since one note in one place which is wrong, as it presupposes a knowledge of something I hadn't at the time of making the notes. No doubt my critics will find it, so I won't bother to say where it is.

And I must confess that, by way of adding a touch of artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative, as Pooh-Bah remarked, I altered a few things here and there. For instance, I had painted poor old Stalybrass a good deal blacker, or rather a deeper purple than was strictly true to life. He wasn't really such a bad sort, nor, perhaps, quite so unpleasant as I made him out to be. After knocking about with him throughout all these weeks, I found several things to admire sincerely in him. But with the object of giving the thing a little plot, and not so that it should be a mere record of meals, scenery and conversations, I drew him in darker colours, so that he should figure in some wise as a villain in it. Once you have a villain, it's easy to work up a sound construction, for you have the two alternative endings, either of which will make of your story an organic whole. Either the villain is reformed by some good woman, or else he is punished by death, for his villainy. I didn't want to kill poor old Stalybrass, so I was about to choose the former alternative ; and it had the merit of being the true one, for he was rapidly altering under Celia's hands and would soon be vastly improved.

But I needn't have bothered to tamper with the truth, for without any help from me, the plot thickened

entirely of its own accord, and circumstances provided me with a villain ready made, and if you will hurry with me to the Golden Horn and onwards, you will hear about it.

I would like to give you details of our visit there, and how we approached the Sultan's City, and saw it beautiful as a painted picture, as it lay between two seas, with its minarets like silver spears, pricking ever and ever upwards into the pale primrose ecstasy of the evening skies ; or of the wonders of the Rumeli Hissar, or the surpassing beauties of the sweet waters of Europe, or the countless profusion of mosques and the multicoloured palaces of the languid Bosphorus. Or else of the Royal Turbeh where lies Sulieman the Second, and but a stone's-throw from him, Rozelana, dancing girl and Sultana too, the walls of whose tomb are covered with exquisite blue tiles, branched in almond and tulips.

> "Where rarely sunbeam of the morn,
> Or ev'ning moonbeam ever stray'd,
> Above the ground she trod in scorn,
> Here, draped in samite and brocade,
> Behold the great Sultana laid."

Or of the bazaars and all their curious wares and stuffs, and many curious noises in the minor keys, and, to be less poetical, of all their curious, interesting smells.

But I am afraid I mustn't do so. It would not be relevant to the events I must now chronicle. But what I must tell you is that a few days after our arrival in Constantinople, the P.M. got a sudden, though he said by no means unexpected telegram, saying that he must get back home as soon as possible, as the stop-gaps had got themselves and everything else into an awful muddle, he supposed—here he sighed—through want of —— tact. Yes, he said it. And never winced. It shows how much better he was. We all sympathised with him from the bottom of our hearts, but nevertheless

wished that the stop-gaps had all been safely out of the way at Poughkeepsie, and that they'd left sensible people to deal with things in their absence, as then our trip might not have been interrupted in this way. For, of course, the yacht was going to steer straight across the seas at double the speed she came out at and deposit the P.M. at the point from which he could get most quickly to London; and that, according to the time-tables and other calculations, would be reached by going up the Adriatic to Venice and from there on by train.

And another thing I must tell you is, that the news we were going into the Adriatic again had the most frightful effect upon the skipper. He screamed as if he were in pain and roared like a bull. I never saw man so undone. When he came to, after his seizure, he looked like a shrunken old man. I was quite smitten with compunction as I looked at him, for really he had wasted away in a few hours and I noticed that even his very eyeballs seemed to have got thin. Some of the ladies heard the noise and were alarmed, but we spun them a yarn of how one of the crew was having his usual attack of tertiary fever and that it would soon pass away, and that they were merely putting him into a cold bath to bring his temperature down, which mounts very high in these tropical illnesses, but soon becomes normal again.

The second mate Murphy was rather crestfallen when he heard the news that we were going back by the Adriatic and told us a curious thing. One day, it was the Friday he thought, when the skipper and two or three of the lads were in the bazaar, not far from where you turn out to go to Seraskiers tower, a fakir, for no reason in the world, stopped in front of the skipper and, singling him with wild looks and warning gestures, pointed to his tongue, which he stuck out. Then he emptied some sand out of a little bag on to the ground and made different tracings in it with his finger, muttering and gibbering; and if he, Murphy, wasn't a

Dutchman and mistaken altogether, the tracings were nothing more or less than a rough drawing of the Adriatic, for there was the boot of Italy and the Greek shore and some of the islands, all complete. The skipper had turned deathly pale and they had to take him to a dram shop and pour spirits into him to revive him and practically carry him back to the quays. The odd thing about it is that the Hindu hadn't asked for a single coin, but after showing him, swept the sand into the bag and went off like a flash ; which proves to you that people may sell good news dearly, but will give away bad news for nothing, all the world over. And bad news he was quite sure it was and we were all in it. He wished the trip was over. It had begun badly, and would end badly. It had taken us to all sorts of uncanny places and this was the worst of all. You couldn't go anywhere or buy anything that they didn't insist on your putting the end of a beastly nargeelay or hubble-bubble in your mouth, and your sucking at the nasty thing with yards and yards of coils of tubes like snakes. They weren't wholesome—too jolly like the heathen things those yellow-faced, long-nailed, almond-eyed chaps smoked in the Chinese quarter at Frisco !

Andy, the negro steward, was in a state of collapse from blue funk. But Bates the first mate was quite calm and took charge of the ship altogether from now and we were entirely set up and eased in our minds at sight of him. He was the calm, collected Yankee to the life, with a square capable face. So why worry ? We laid ourselves out to enjoy what remained of the trip in peace.

We metaphorically chalked a line across the Ægean, only swerving from it enough not to bump into any of the various islands that lay athwart our course. Imbros, Tenedos, and Lemnos were all passed after dark.

The flirtations which had been on the tapis all through our trip, redoubled in force now that there was

no sightseeing to be done. I was so occupied in following Celia about with my eyes and my thoughts that I hardly noticed the scenery, except as a background to her pretty figure. I think our intimacy had gone forward several steps since the day we spent together at Eleusis. She was wearing some very crisp little garments she had had specially made for the trip, semi-nautical in character, and she looked like Grace Darling, up to date. But she was too busy to give me much time. Stalybrass was getting his daily treatments more regularly than on shore and was gradually succumbing to them. He was undoubtedly beginning to notice things, for I saw him glancing surreptitiously at the clothes she wore and admiring them. Before he met her, all women were alike to him, and all women's clothes too. Clothes were clothes and there the matter ended. A hat from the Rue de la Paix worn by a viscountess was the same to him as the old tweed cap the charwoman drew on over her tousled hair to go out and bargain at the fried fish stall round the corner. But his bulging eyes were undoubtedly developing the faculty of noticing things—not merely seeing them—and all thanks to Celia. I am sure that by now he could see that what she wore was superior to the things worn by a large percentage of the women about. and note what a very potent thing the ordinary sailor cap could be on the head of a pretty woman when she pushed all her hair inside it, cocked it over her forehead in correct able-bodied seaman style, with the dodgy little ribbons twirling and whipping over one ear. And how very nice the softest and finest of white silk jumpers could be, with little anchors embroidered on collar and cuffs, and a pleated skirt that sprayed out as a person walks swiftly by. It was characteristic of Celia to have gone to all the bother of designing these delightful and alluring items of feminine attire, and of going to the trouble and expense of getting them carried out, with a view to impressing and influencing Stalybrass for his good. As a rule when you see a woman wearing a

particularly nice dress, you know she is up to no good, but not so Celia. If you saw her wearing a ravishingly beautiful and becoming dress, you knew she was bent on an errand of mercy. And so, as she had planned, Stalybrass was completely subjugated by them, and by her, and followed her about like a lamb, and his metamorphosis went on apace. Already he was less didactic and at times threw out remarks that distinctly savoured of toleration, and in which there was a hint that the thought had occurred to him that there were others besides himself who might know a thing or two. In fact, to put it in a nutshell, he was sinking fast—preparatory to his moral rebirth.

I watched him very carefully, for I felt I wanted to be by him when the moment came, and I must witness it, if possible. It might suddenly occur at any time. One never knew. He might be the old Stalybrass to-day at eleven-thirty A.M., and by twelve-thirty P.M. of the same day he might be the new man who had stepped into his shoes, collar, vest, Albert watch chain, and so forth, and who would continue to wear them and would call himself by the name of Stalybrass henceforth.

Have you ever heard of worn-out scientists waiting in breathless suspense for the culmination of some series of experiments which had been going on for years? Have you ever heard of horticultural enthusiasts and experts sitting up night after night for weeks and even months on end, to watch some rare plant which only blooms, say, once every fifty years, suddenly throw out its flower?

Well, their interest was as nothing to the interest I used to feel at seeing the results of Celia's experiments or in watching these human blossomings under her expert guidance. I was glad in a way, for the sake of those she experimented on, but also I felt a little sorry for them often enough, for they seemed to feel awfully weak and dizzy and uncertain in their new characters and ideas, at times.

And was it surprising?

Think of what it must be to a man who had always made a point of contradicting everything that everybody else says, to feel an uncanny and hitherto unknown sensation surging inside him, on hearing someone speak, prompting him to hold his tongue, and telling him that the other fellow may be right in what he is saying.

Think of the strain on a man, who has been full of bumptiousness all his life, ready to judge others without knowing anything about them, and to voice his judgment loudly, to be suddenly pulled up by a beastly foreboding that after all it may not be his mission in life to judge others but to be judged by them instead.

Think of how it must cause a man to give at the knees, who hitherto has always thought himself perfect in every detail, to find that suddenly the most awful waves of self-doubt are breaking over him, and threatening to overwhelm him entirely.

At such moments, people need help, and whenever I saw them coming, I tried to be at hand with a kindly word or two and even to offer the succour of a small drop of brandy neat.

But as well as I can recall the Stalybrass affair now, he went to bed one night as his old self, and came in to breakfast next day as the new man : awfully hungry, after the strange occurrences of the small hours, and rather pale, and with many humble questions in his face, instead of many smug answers and predictions and brusque assertions ; he wore an expression as of having awakened later but more completely than he had ever done before, to find the day had gone forward without him, and that many things had occurred while he slept into which he must inquire and be grateful for the information if accorded.

After this he would look at things a lot, listen to people a lot, think things out a lot, and not talk such a lot.

And now, just as we were all engaged in innocent and in some cases useful enjoyment as I've shown you,

the plot began to thicken. The thickening process began with a few harmless drops of rain. We'd hardly seen any during the whole time of the trip and greeted it as rather an agreeable novelty. But by degrees, the nice warm breezes began to get chillier and chillier and more fitful. We made the discovery that a yacht can be a very uncomfortable place, if the weather turns out cold. There are so many unexpected little draughts that find out the vulnerable places in one's body or clothing. There's a little place above one's collar, where a draught gets down with long, slim cold fingers ; or else it puffs up one's trouser legs or else into one's eyes or ears. No matter how luxurious the fittings on a yacht, the air seems to consider it has the right of free egress and ingress everywhere. This is nice, if it is sultry, but horrid if it's not. And draughts are most disturbing to flirtations.

The first few drops of rain increased in number, till we were surrounded by them, as by a damp cheerless mist, and then changed to hard hailstones. The sailors ran about a good bit overhead and looked out across the rails, shading their eyes. I heard one say to another that, this was the coast for dirty weather, and he jolly well thought we were in for it this time, or else his experience counted for nothing, and began to hunt up oilskins from odd corners. However, next morning things seemed better, though there was a cold bluish crepitation all over the sea's surface, which up to now had seemed like some warm languid liquid. The rain had passed off for the moment but by the intense lowering clearness of the atmosphere, we knew there was a big gathering of it yet in store for us. Passing upward by the sides of Élis and Achaia, the distant mountains, instead of seeming like flat vague forms half materialising out of sheeny mists, loomed large upon us, and seemed quite close, in all the completest substantiality and to the smallest detail. You could see their little chilly green pastures and the scoriations on their rocks. They seemed so near that you could

plumb their gorges, so clear that you could span their crevasses, and calculate distances from foreground to background and middle distance in between. They were cut this way and that by streaks of shade. You knew that the creeping shadows were thrown by clouds, and the stationary broomy patches cuddling into hollows or sprawling over headlands were low forests of stunted trees and undergrowth : you almost saw the leaves on the twigs. There was a distraught, wild look over everything. The sea looked morose and vast, and one registered to oneself a feeling that it was a much more important and not-to-be-ignored thing than one gave it credit for in viewing it from the land. Out there in its waste, one felt it had an appreciable magnitude indeed. And at the back of one's consciousness the question arose, why should it one day be the sweetest sunniest blue and another day a wicked sparkling green, all gashed and slashed across with sinister bars of dark bodeful purple and with wild white splashes of spitting scud being driven before a whistling wind, that gathered in volume every moment.

There are times when one dismisses nature as boring or trite, or as a negligible quantity. One admits that the air and elements generally can combine and produce remarkably beautiful effects which poets and sentimental people like to dwell upon. Again, there are times when one dismisses what one sees about one, as sights which are too frequently visible to be worth bothering about. What are the mountains after all, you ask yourself, but big rubbish heaps, piled up, scored, fused matter, which are solidified evidences of volcanic eruptions; their fissures and crannies—otherwise called scenery—only due to the cracking processes of an earth, cooling automatically, after having come into being a great heat. The hills are the same on a smaller scale, mere piles of earth, and what is earth but mud, dry and in large quantities. As for the sea, anyone who has been educated at an ordinary Board school will tell you it's nothing but a large volume of

water, with a certain amount of salt in solution, varying in amount in different seas.

But then again, there are moments when this mood does not prevail: when you find yourself face to face with Nature. You look at the mountains and you realise that if you were to attempt to climb their jagged heights on foot, to get to a given place across them, it would need months and you'd arrive bleeding and exhausted. If you were to land, and attempt to traverse those regions which look so small in comparison with what they really are, how long, you ask yourself, would it take you, a wandering hungry speck, to overcome the weary miles?

Then for the sea, think how utterly defeated you would be by it, if you were set to swim across it. Tales of its force as a driving agent, tales of the vast pieces of masonry—blocks of stone many yards square—picked up like nothing and tossed for a quarter of a mile—come into your mind; you know quite well that the weight of its accumulated drops can crush the mightiest vessel into a wild tangle—steel hulls, stanchions, brass rails, machinery, everything—long before the sea-bed could be reached. Looking down at it, the imagination flashes a picture of the most unutterable, limitless, watery-green lonelinesses. You think of its depths; it occurs to you that the solitary and insignificant-looking rocks come upon at odd times out on these wide wastes, must in reality be the topmost peaks of vast systems of sea alps, whose ghostly seaweedy valleys lie fathoms and fathoms below in the plains of the sea, haunted for ever by ghoulish fish and slimy sea-reptiles.

Bates was on the navigating bridge, and it was pleasant to see him up there, dominant and, one felt sure, resourceful.

There was a thrust of clouds above the shore hill, that gave him some cause for thought, it was understood, and sure enough, before very long they had come

up and come up endlessly, piling up, inkily and monstrously, till the sky was of a brooding blackness, the colour of which, as I kept aimlessly repeating to myself, reminded me of nothing so much as of the hopeless blackish-bluish shade of squashed blackberries. Soon we were almost enveloped in a complete darkness, except where occasional sporadic patches of sickly light appeared on the hills, like patches of inflammation on some unhealthy body.

Along by the edge of the land ran a long gash of lurid, evil-looking green light. Where these uncanny and unwholesome-looking reflections came from, I can't think, for by now the sky was almost entirely overcast. Presently they too disappeared.

Some of us were on deck, in a little group, watching it, fascinated ; for by now we felt that for sure something was coming to us, and later on we knew we'd be ordered down below.

There had been a fairly fresh breeze blowing all day and it now died down, and the sea became immediately like oil, sticky and heavy and leaden-hued. In a far corner we saw a red smouldering glare come by degrees, as if a fire had been lit at the edge of the earth, and a great hand had lifted up a corner of a pall to show it us. Then a perfectly extraordinary breathless silence fell on everything—a sort of boding sinister hush.

It seemed as if it were a sort of stage wait, in one of Nature's dramas. It lasted for about fifteen minutes and then the storm broke.

May I never see such elemental rage and frenzied malevolence possess the world again !

The wind rose up in the space of seconds, with the scream of an ascending rocket, and literally fell upon us and beat at us. The sea fetched up in monster waves and battered at us. And then, before we knew where we were, began an Inferno, a perfect Walpurgis night of yells, calls, hoots, bawls and bellowings, with an undercurrent of awful whisperings, as the waters we shipped green, ran up our rigging and licked our decks

sibilantly and fell off again, to be met by worse waves still.

It seemed as if stentorian voices were calling to us from the hollow shores, directing us, telling us to go forward, and then others rose and told us to go backwards; then they howled and contradicted each other, and then joined all together to shriek something at us and then mocked us diabolically and roared with laughter at our plight. Through all this leading clamour and din, all the little things on the yacht chanted separate dirges of their own. Every little bit of loose cordage sang its own ghastly song. Every keyhole cried and moaned like a lost soul that day, and anything that could batter about, battered about. The thunder cannoned and blared, the lightning crackled and snapped like whips. We were in whirlpool; we were in whirlwind; we were uprooted and tossed down and swallowed down and vomited up.

The world was in a frenzy of rage and our poor little cockleshell of a boat was, apparently, its object.

I clung to something, I forget what. I thought every moment my hands would be wrenched away and that I'd go overboard. Afterwards it came to me that it was nothing short of a marvel, that we lost none of the crew that way.

I believe we then made for the open sea, fearing the coasts. Dimly (for my brain was too numb with cold and something like horror, to act), I felt it was not fair to the little yacht to subject her to such a strain.

Great Jove! how that sea behaved! Not satisfied with wreaking the fury of the immediately surrounding waters on us, it seemed to call up legions and battalions from other seas and then launch them at us. And these having failed, it called up more and set them on us too. We were exhausted. We were spent. We rolled helplessly, and of headway we made none. But where should we head to? Our one and only chance lay in at all costs keeping as far from any coast as

possible, and to let ourselves be churned and spurned far out in that perishing waste of waters.

The boats on their davits were now full of water, and despite the efforts of the crew, the weight broke the ropes of one and down it went, to be seen no more.

I don't know what the time can have been—perhaps seven bells or so that the worst happened. We had every man Jack of us been ordered below by this. The women were a clustering, clinging, white-faced crowd in the saloon ; the men stood about with their cheeks burning and red after the lash of the wind and water on them. It seemed so odd to be in there, amidst elegant furnishings, and luxurious appointments, with the electric light shedding a soft radiance over all, and to know that only three-fifths or so of an inch separated us from the baying hell hounds that howled and tore outside. We clung to the chairs and sofas as best we could. No one was sea-sick. It was curious to note that mental anxiety had mastered every other sensation, bodily and otherwise.

We had been wallowing in the trough of one wave and we had just been picked up on the crest of another, so that our nose must have been buried deep, and the stern have risen high in the air. Those of us not on our guard, slid in a huddle to the forward end of the saloon, and were bruised all over. Without any warning, we came down by the stern again with one almighty whack on something ! There was a crash and a shuddering tremor, and then silence.

We had plunged down on—something ! Hit—something ! But what ? That was the question. Had we struck a reef ? Had it made a hole ? And would it now be a question of minutes before we filled and sank ?

We all pulled ourselves up hurriedly and held together. The maids set up a weeping and exclaiming. (They had been brought in for company and lest they would be over-anxious and we all had our life-belts on.) But nothing happened. A few moments passed, and a

few more still, and still nothing happened. Nor was there anything more to be heard; nor did the yacht tilt or behave any differently. I stood listening. Feeling. Ah, yes! I *did* miss something. I didn't notice any more that little squirm of recovery that a ship makes as soon as the propeller ceases racing and engages in the water again.

Just then I was called to the door and asked to pass a message in of all's well. It was Hitch himself, streaming with water. I did so, but I slipped out, drawing the door across, and caught hold of his oilskin and asked what had happened. "There's something wrong, I know," I said.

"Yes, man, there is. We've damaged our steering. She came down whack on a piece of floating wreckage —some other poor chaps have been done for—and smashed both propellers; and now we are going to drift about at the mercy of the waves. God help us! We can't help ourselves! And the wireless has gone to bits."

"But can nothing be done? Can't we rig up a sail or something?"

"You couldn't possibly get a sail up in this gale. There's only one chance. Bates says we have passed through the north-west quadrant of a circular storm, the centre of the disturbance being somewhere south-east, and he thinks—mind you, he only *thinks*—that with luck we may pass out of it before very long. It's a bare chance, that's all!"

Well, the great thing was, of course, to conceal our anxiety from the women. They need not know till the end actually came, and they might be spared hours of useless suspense and misery. I got in again, with a look on my face as if the news was the best possible—and proposed they should lie on the floor and rest, as far as the awful tossing would permit. They seemed quite quiet and satisfied when they heard we had not gone on a rock. To "strike a rock" seemed to be the

thing they most of all feared. They seemed oblivious of all the other awful things that might happen to us at every instant. I went off and filled two brandy flasks and pocketed a few ship's biscuits and sundries. One never knew.

From the moment of hitting the wreckage, it seemed as if the storm lessened. Gradually at first, but then quite perceptibly, and though still very violent, in about two and a half hours' time it was nothing like what it had been at its worst.

I put on my oilskins and went up. The lightning had ceased, and though the wind still blew tempestuously, the awful scream had gone from it. It seemed inclined to be wet and the wet not to be caused by the sea spray, but by rain. And if it were rain, it was a sure sign it would decline soon. If only—— But what was the use of repining? We had struck the wreckage, and it was utterly impossible to predict what might happen to us next, and there was an end of the matter as far as we were concerned. We would go drifting and turning, drifting and turning, whichever way the winds and currents listed. Every now and again the siren lifted its voice and hooted peevishly, asking for assistance and bewailing our troubles, but no answering call came out of the murk and gloom. The night wore on and the storm still continued to abate. The anchor had been let down in the hopes of getting it to hold but the bottom was bad and we went along dragging it at the end of I don't know how many fathoms of chain.

Later we men went on deck, for it was now possible to keep one's feet, and we mingled with the crew, straining our eyes and ears, in case we could see or hear anything. We couldn't be so very far off land, some were saying; Bates was explaining to Hitchcock they had been able to get the lead working for the last quarter of an hour, and that by soundings we should undoubtedly be close to some of the islands about here, though he couldn't be quite sure which. His great fear—and he lowered his voice—was of striking one of the outlying reefs, for as

yet the sea was too high for the boats to live in it ; though he thought that at the rate it was going down, say in an hour's time, if not overloaded, the thing could be done. But it meant getting into them in the pitch dark, and once in them, it would be a matter of rowing round aimlessly in the cold wind and wet all night, and they would inevitably get separated and probably be lost, as the currents were very strong in these parts, and would just suck them along, goodness knows where. But if only we could drift along harmlessly till daylight came and the sea subsided, and we could anchor, then we stood an excellent chance of getting everyone into them and landing them on some bit of mainland or islet ; and thus all hands could be saved.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the look-out man started to sing out something. And well he might ; for a miracle had happened. We didn't quite know how much of a miracle till later, as we couldn't see our hands in front of our faces, but still we realised even then it was one. With a sudden mild grating, soughing noise, almost devoid of abruptness, we ran straight into something (and even in the dark, we knew it was something large and soft) and stayed stock-still and made never another budge.

"By G—d, we're saved!" said Bates, his voice rising, with a catch in it. "We're on a sand-bank. I know by the feel of it. We're on a lee-shore, it's the turning of the storm, and nothing on earth will move her now!"

He told me afterwards that he knew exactly by the sort of soft shudder that ran completely through the yacht that this was the case. He'd been in a boat some years before that had gone on one in just the same way. The unexpected repetition of the same precise feeling and sounds had made him feel awfully queer. At first he thought he was dreaming and that his brain was not working properly, owing to anxiety and over-fatigue.

It wasn't until we had burnt a few lights that we saw what was around us, and grasped the full miraculousness of the miracle that had befallen us. For by the sizzling, dripping flame we saw that we had—as neatly and precisely as if it had been done in daylight, with perfect steering and knowledge of our whereabouts—run straight into a sheltered narrow sandy cove. We saw ourselves in a place where, if twenty storms had burst over our heads, nothing could possibly harm us. The anchor had suddenly held, slewed us round and done the trick for us as neat as a pin. Guests, attendants and crew mingled tears of joy. After Hitchcock had made Andy (who had once again turned a healthy black colour) bring up a couple of dozen bottles or more of the boy, and we had despatched them, we sang *Auld Lang Syne.*

As far as we could make out, the time was about three bells when we grounded, but this we couldn't exactly vouch for, as we were all too much excited to bother about the time. We made out it was an island, though which, we were not sure.

We all turned in worn out by what we had been through. I slept like a log, and I dare say the others did too, as soon as it was realised that the greedy waves were not going to have us, at any rate for this trip. The storm and everything connected with it was forgotten, and though the wind still blew it was with a soft southerly sound and nothing threatening in it.

I woke with a start to find the sun positively pouring in through the bull's-eye glass of my port-hole. Where the—— ? What the—— ? Then I remembered.

I jumped up like a flash, drew on my nether garments and a dressing-gown and tore up on deck and looked about me, at the cove and the beach and the island straight ahead. It was incredible—nay—it was almost a scandal. The day had dawned as exquisitely and as radiantly as ever day had dawned since the first creation of the world. The east blushed a little still, faintly and peachily. The air was balmy, the sky an

innocent blue, where a few little newly washed clouds hung as if they had been put there to dry. The violent hail and pouring rain which had drenched the foliage on the hill-sides had all been turned by the sun's bright rays into a soft perfumed moisture, and every time a twig stirred there came to one's nostrils a waft of intoxicating perfume.

The whole landscape and the sea, especially the sea, had an air of heavenly surprise and a look about it which seemed to say: "*Surely* you can't think I'd be capable of doing such a thing as that?"—meaning the yacht cast ashore. It was a look I remembered seeing on the face of a dear little child immediately after it had been caught doing something it shouldn't, something very, very naughty.

I looked down the yacht's sloping side to where the keel had driven deep in the bank, and then lifted my gaze again. Could it be possible that this was the same sea that last night's awful lightning had revealed to me, a sea that raged and raved like a hundred thousand vociferating furies come screaming from Hades to destroy us?

It was now in infantine mood and the baby waves had baby ways and talked baby talk along the goldy-silver sands, and lisped in the pebbly creek. From where I was on deck, I could see the outlying humpy rocks that lay supine in the ocean, half in, half out of the limpid gurgling waters. Now and again tiny wavelets played about them, gently patting them and stirring their floating weeds, so that they looked for all the world as if they had been so many lazy old sea gods or mermen, and that the waves were little naiads sporting with them. As for the island, it was there, straight ahead of us, close on us, a land of green enchantment, smiling idly and almost foolishly at us, welcoming us to its nodding groves and palmy bowers.

I looked, but I could discern no sign of human habitation.

Mr Hitchcock came up behind me in his bedroom

slippers and clapped me on the shoulder. I turned and we gripped without speaking. His green cigar was in full blast once more but the hand that held it shook a trifle.

Presently we fell to congratulating one another and expatiating on the marvellous series of chances and combinations of circumstances by which we found ourselves there. By gum, wait till they heard of this in Poughkeepsie ! (We could afford to crack a joke now.) Looking back on the storm, what a nightmare it had all been—and yet, what a long way off it all seemed now. The yacht could be repaired where she was, he thought, but supposed it would be best to pay salvage and get her towed home. We'd all have to make the journey by steamer and there was no doubt we'd get one any day, as we were only about fifteen miles from the mainland, and the wireless would soon be working again. They had a repair shop on board for that. Hitchcock said with emotion that Bates had been a perfect Trojan. He'd kept a cool head through everything and deserved every praise. He'd not forget it him. And by the way, talking about Bates, the skipper had gone off again into one of his tantrums. They wanted him to have a little air, and early that morning, before I was up or anyone about, they let him up. When he saw the island, instead of being overjoyed, the ungrateful beggar howled like a dervish, shook his fist at it, and running to the far end, tried to jump overboard ; though whether to end his life or swim to another part of the globe, they couldn't say. They mastered him, however, and he was now safely locked away downstairs. It beat all, to see a man carry on so at his age. He'd sack him and hand him over to the authorities as soon as he could do so, and keep Bates on as skipper.

Just then we saw a little group come out through the trees and walk down to the beach.

" Hello ! They're up early," I said, for I made out Celia and Dan, spick and span in white things, and looking as if it was the most ordinary everyday thing in

the world to be wrecked on an island, and showing no signs of excitement whatever. They were accompanied by three women, evidently inhabitants, dark-skinned and wearing bizarre gaudy dresses, kilted up queerly in odd folds, and quaint jewellery. They stood watching the yacht and Dan signalled to us to come to them.

Hitch said: "Ah, they've found someone. We sent some parties out to see if they could find out exactly where we are, and what chances we have of being picked up soon, and Dan of course is the first to do any business. He's some dandy fellow."

With a word to one of the seamen to send below for the Greek sailor we had aboard, we had the gangway lowered and the three of us, including the Greek, got into a dinghy and oared ourselves through the shallow water of the creek to the beach. There was a foot or two of water by the keel. I was careless of the fact that I was in my dressing-gown and only partly robed underneath. What is the good of being shipwrecked and immediately getting oneself up as if for Bond Street? My dressing-gown and Hitchcock's bedroom slippers lent a correct flavour to the proceedings.

"Look here, sir, I've got hold of some women," says Dan, "but I don't really know if there was much sense in bringing them along. They won't speak—not a word. Not that I could understand them if they did, but I mean I don't even know if our Greek friend can make anything of them, but maybe he can try. Of course there are sure to be others, if these are deaf or dumb or half-witted, but the only village I can see is miles up the side of a high mountain. I met these wandering down our way and brought them along."

Hadjios, the Greek, addressed them, but they only shook their heads and gesticulated. It was obvious that they were very excited at the sight of the yacht. They waved their arms like windmills, pinching, nudging and jogging each other, and their eyes almost leapt from their sockets. Hadjios tried again, but they took no notice. It was funny, but one felt somehow

that they understood perfectly what he was saying to them, but for some odd reason refused to take any notice. Indeed, they deliberately avoided looking at him and only gave the most abrupt and negative shakes of their heads when he spoke, half turning away from him.

"It's awfully queer," he said in English. "I can't make them out. They know what I'm saying quite well."

"They're not half-witted," said Hitchcock, removing his cigar and looking at them carefully. "They're full of intelligence. In fact, they are more alive and intelligent than most other European peasants would be, but they don't mean to talk while we are by."

Certainly their faces were very alive and eager and different expressions flitted over them, chasing each other across them in rapid sequence. They'd look at each other, move their eyes and lips, noses even, and grimace rapidly, and apparently each understood at once what the other meant.

One took the lead (she was the oldest), and lifting one arm dramatically, pointed to the wreck, and proceeded to give in dumb show, to the two others, her idea of what had occurred in connection with its lying there. The others watched her, nodding vigorously and evidently acquiescing, now and again interrupting her by laying a hand on her arm and giving her some idea of their own. It was extraordinary, but the woman really did, by her pantomime, give a perfectly correct account of the gathering of the storm, of its bursting, of our anxiety, of the captain's anxiety, and of the fright of the women, and the stern self-control of the men facing death without flinching. She showed us the wild waves and cowered before the lightning and shuddered at the thought of drowning, and sighted land and swooned with joy at the final great deliverance.

She never uttered a single word and yet contrived to bring the whole scene before our eyes again. She left Sarah Bernhardt nowhere.

We stood by with our mouths open. Truth is stranger, far, than fiction and we had lived through a great deal, which, looking back on it now that it was all over, seemed like a thing we had read of, but had never dreamt of as likely to befall us. Everything was queer. The wreck, the creek, the island, my dressing-gown, Hitch's bedroom slippers, the sand, the sea, the shells crackling under our feet.

And these women were the queerest of all.

Several times as we stood in that group there, I felt everything go round in my head. I wondered if I was I, and if I wasn't I, who was I, and what it is to be an I, and if it is strictly necessary to be an I. The voices seemed to come to me from a long distance off, and the things I looked at seemed to be so small as to be almost vanishing away, like they do when you look at them through the wrong end of a telescope.

But Americans don't get carried away by unusual things much.

"I have two opinions about these ladies," said Hitch, knocking the ash off his green cigar, "and either may be right. The first is that they are having a bit of fun with us, at our expense. I give you that suggestion for what it is worth. As a rule islanders—unless they are cannibals—are hospitable and don't poke fun at people who have the misfortune to be thrown on their mercy, so to speak. Also they know it doesn't pay, so I think we may dismiss it. My second is, that we have been washed up on the shore of a land which may claim to be the original home of all the movie actors and actresses in the world. This is the finest kinema show I have ever seen. There can be no manner of doubt but that it is right here that the idea of the movie pictures first had its origin and conception. It is *vury* inter-esting. *Vury* inter-esting."

The women had ceased chattering together for a moment, watching him as he spoke. Having done with the wreck, they began to take stock of us all now, and to discuss in their own wordless way our characters

and appearance and relationships. Hitchcock was our father. One of the women gave us a striking portrait of him dandling his two children, Celia and Dan, on his knees; to my great delight, and Celia's annoyance, they decided that she and I were husband and wife (with appropriate gestures, which caused us to blush rather sheepishly, for the worst of it was, that anything they set out to say, they said it in the clearest way possible).

But still, if Hadjios addressed them, they'd not utter a word. Only discuss it among themselves with gestures and grimaces.

"I can't make them out, sir, unless——"

"Unless what, Hadjios?"

"Oh, nothing much, sir. A little idea of my own. I'll go up to the village. I'm sure I'll get all the information I want there. I sha'n't be long, sir!"

As soon as Hadjios had departed, they showed us by unmistakable signs that they wished to come on board and have a look round. So Hitch said, "Why, certainly," and we got them into the boat and got over to the gangway steps.

As we reached the deck we found several pallid pretty faces appearing up the companion-way, whose owners were frightfully interested at seeing these natives of the place. And still more interested when they heard our description of them, and saw for themselves how it was with them. I forgot to say that the older one, the one with the histrionic powers which left those of Sarah Bernhardt out in the cold, was wizened and very plain, in spite of the intelligence in her face.

They were entranced with what they saw, and went everywhere most conscientiously, even into the ladies' cabins, looking at their toilet things and the powders, lip-salves, lotions and flowered and lacy garments hanging behind doors, or trinkets lying about. They were quite polite, though they made no bones about letting everyone know what they thought of everything. The

drawback of this facial language certainly was that it seemed more difficult to conceal one's thoughts in it, than is the case in ordinary speech.

Having finished the inspection of the ladies' cabins, in one of which Lady Shaw was still sleeping peacefully, with some biscuits within easy reach, they went through the saloons, boudoirs and smoking-rooms, and having exhausted these, down to see the kitchens and quarters occupied by the crew.

These latter were commodious and beautifully kept, and bright and gay with knick-knacks and photos of sweethearts, wives and children, or other relations. These were duly inspected and criticised.

As they lifted the curtain and entered the last cabin, suddenly the oldest woman put her hand to her heart and uttered a rusty raucous cry, and seized a photograph of the skipper which was pinned by Bates' shaving-glass.

It was an awful struggling cry and left her skinny throat as if it tore its way out. She uttered yet another and then, as if the pent-up speech of years were choking her, she began to pour out a torrent of words, hoarse and voluble, hardly letting one get out before the other was on its heels pell-mell. She appeared to apostrophise and then again to anathematise the portrait ; then she kissed it and screamed and clasped it to her withered bosom and then wound up the scene by fainting. We were dumbfounded, for the entire thing was so unexpected.

Hearing the row, I'd come in half shaved. Hadjios came in too, just arrived from his expedition, and standing at my elbow, said : " It is as I thought, sir, she is his wife."

The excitement of the other two women was painful. They seemed beside themselves, and though neither actually spoke, even now a few rusty inarticulate sounds escaped them, as it were involuntarily, and under stress of great emotion.

I forget if I mentioned they were both something

under twenty-five years old or so, I don't think any more.

We laid Sarah Bernhardt out on the bunk and in spite of the flutter of excitement and sympathy that swept over the ladies, they managed to administer very excellent first aid for all sorts of trouble, drowning, poisoning, asphyxiation, presence of a foreign body in the throat, apoplexy, everything that you could find in the St John's Ambulance Hand-book, without getting in each other's way or doing the patient any good.

I beckoned to Hadjios.

"What's that you said just now? I didn't quite catch it. Something about the skipper being related to her."

"I said he was her husband, sir."

"Her *husband*! Surely not."

"Yes, sir. It's like this, sir. This island we have been wrecked on is the old island of Calypso, and, as you can imagine, there would be a lot of queer old habits and ways clinging to it. I am a Greek from one of the Cyclades, and you would hardly believe me if I were to tell you of some of the goings-on on some of them. I've just found out (though I already had some idea of it) that here it is the custom of the country for the men when they marry to go away to make their fortunes, leaving their wives behind to await their coming back. But during all the time they are away the wives are pledged to silence. They may not speak *at all*, in sickness or in health, whatever befalls them, or under whatever circumstances they find themselves, until the husband comes back. It's an awful law, and how they ever came to allow it, I can't think, sir, and the worst of it is, they observe it most rigorously, for the older women are very severe and harsh with the younger women over it and see that they carry it out at all costs."

I whistled.

"Here's a kettle of fish. *What* a rum go!"

"Yes, I found it out in the village. I understand

their dialect quite well, except a few words here and there. The skipper married her twenty years ago and never came back."

"And never meant to either, I'll bet!"

"No! I don't suppose so. But Fate was too much for him."

"Hadjios, it looks to me as if these old gods had a strong sense of humour. What do you think?"

"Maybe, sir, but I think it's their way of punishing him. Some of her relations are on the way down."

"Oh, they are, are they? I think that means, then, that we will have to stand by and see that there's no harm done. What a rum go! Now one can see so plainly what all the dreams and portents were, and the seizures. Of course, they were all done on purpose, to put us off coming this way at all. He was afraid something might happen."

"But it was very odd about the Hindu fakir, sir."

"By Jove! it was. I'd forgotten all about him."

What would they say to this if ever they got to hear of it at Poughkeepsie!

As I said before, I do not wish my simple tale to figure in the light of a tragedy, so I will not therefore go into the details of the skipper's first meeting with his poor deserted wife and erstwhile inamorata. But that he was a villain black enough to thicken any plot cannot, I think, be denied; nevertheless, like many criminals far advanced in the technique of crime, he must be absolved to the extent of admitting that he had not started out on his career in life with any sinister intentions. This they tell me bulks largely in the eye of the recording angel, who is then inclined to lay the blame, up to a point, on circumstances. Far from planning harm, he told us, he had sailed away from his native place and island bride with a heart swollen to bursting-point, of which half the inflation could be justly allowed to be due to sorrow at parting from her, and the other half attributable to the crowding and

surging pressure of good resolutions and earnest intentions for his future conduct.

At first, when he got to America, he thought of her constantly, and wrote her of the home he meant to build for her, and sang at his work. But though he worked hard, it was a long time before he earned any more than he himself could manage to barely subsist on. Money did not flow in as rapidly as it might have done, and then there was a long weary illness and a long convalescence, and only that some friends kindly nursed him and fed him, he would have died. And so the time went on, and he tried first one town and then another, and at last the recollection of his home and early days, and his marriage and his young wife, all seemed to become part of a far-off dream. When at last he was getting good money, he sent big sums of it to her anonymously ; but he had lost all desire to go back to her or his people again. They seemed too vague and too shadowy to have any definite claim on him.

Life in America, he confided to Hitchcock, was so very different from life on the island. It seemed almost impossible to believe that two places so different could co-exist. America was so go-ahead, so real. This island was so remote, so steeped in its old changeless superstitions. He thought it must be rather like Ireland, from what he had read about it.

" You see, when I married, sir, I hadn't seen America —or the American girls."

This way of putting it went straight to poor old Hitchcock's heart, who had begun by meaning to be quite adamantine over his disgraceful behaviour, and impervious to any attempts at justification of his conduct. But he himself was feeling very home-sick just then, after the racking experience he had been through the United States loomed up before him as the most desirable place on earth. So when the skipper laid this remark or excuse, or whatever you prefer to designate it as, quite humbly and simply before him,

the moisture sprang to his eyes, and he was greatly perturbed.

To Hitch there was a world of pathos in the explanation!

It was fixed up that he should do the right thing by his wife and acknowledge her as such. She was to be taken on board the yacht and if she found, on arriving at the other side, that she did not feel happy there, she was to be allowed to return and live upon a fixed income, while the skipper continued where he was, in a life of single blessedness. Her relations he squared by the gift of money—several years' savings.

And so, as a villain, he got off far more lightly than he deserved; for unlike Ulysses, who made repeated attempts to get back to *his* wife, sad Penelope, and who as each succeeding obstacle arose—whether it was the giant Cyclops who tried to eat him, or the blandishments of the love-sick Calypso, detaining him by force—was only goaded by it to further efforts to reach Ithaca, after a short time he didn't make the slightest effort to get the poor thing out of pawn!

In fact, the gods, instead of punishing him, suddenly seemed to take another line; shortly after her arrival on the yacht, it was discovered that she had a unique talent for concocting the most exquisite and savoury stews, which even the yacht's chef declared could not be surpassed. Thus, from being at first an object of mingled contempt and pity, he became a person to be envied by the rest of his shipmates. In a class where a cook and a wife are one and the same thing, he was considered to have carried off a prize such as seldom came out of the marriage lottery.

Hitchcock himself, pausing at the top of the alleyway leading to the kitchens, to sniff appreciatively, said: "She'll be kidnapped when she gets out to America if they ever find out how wonderfully she cooks. For cooks who can cook are vury, vury scarce out there."

I repeat that as the self-appointed and honorary

historian of this cruise and all there was there to record, I have not done well. On reading this account over I am depressed. And yet I tried to make it artistic and attractive, and even borrowed a hint from a great master who in relating of his travels with his donkey in the Cevennes wrote so that he should read at the same pace as the donkey ambled along. I've written it to go at the same speed as the yacht, a good fifteen knots an hour, but by so doing I have made a mistake, for to hurry so, one must write badly, and it is couched in the language of the ordinary washing list, with a few verbs and prepositions thrown in. And I find that I haven't put in a tithe of the really amusing incidents that happened, and such as I have put in are hung awkwardly together on an endless string of trite sentences, composed of hackneyed alliances of words.

I haven't told how we laughed till we were tired at each other's feeble jokes (and especially the very subtle one about Poughkeepsie pronounced either Puffkeepsie or Pekeepsie, according to how one felt). And I've not mentioned the moonlight as it found us in those Ionian waters and poured down on us and turned our hearts upside down in our chests with its strange unholy beauty ; nor how the trails of phosphorus followed our ship like silvery flames as we went along at night.

It is not from want of good material my account is dull ; but I got confused, and found it difficult to know what to choose. Indeed in keeping the matter of the skipper and his doings, in all this latter portion of my account of the trip, I've shown a great deal of restraint, for at the end there was a perfect glut of climaxes and anti-climaxes.

Firstly, Hitchcock proposed to Miss Macinerney and was accepted. It was the hospital plans that did it. They intended to marry and to go on, spending their declining years in building hospitals for children. The yacht was to be turned into a floating crèche, I believe.

Then Miss Sadie got engaged to the prince. I should have put this first, because her father's getting

engaged was the result of her doing so, I dare say, as he naturally would not wish to be left alone. The prince was going back to London by the same train as the P.M., to call together a meeting of his country's representatives, and to sign away all his rights to the throne. They were shadowy, but it was a big thing to do all the same. He was a little man who would do big things quietly, I now saw.

Stalybrass you simply would not have known for the same person, and I vowed I would never again chip Celia on her methods, or question anything she undertook; for he was now in perfect condition and quite suitable as an ornament for any lady's boudoir. And not only that, mark you, but prepared to give his unconquerable and irresistible energy and indomitable force of mind (as revealed to any student of character by one glimpse of his trestle legs) to the relentless proclaiming and advocacy of, in season and out of season, all species of toleration and mutual good will between men—whatever their points of view might be on any subject whatsoever. She had calmly pushed his intolerance into reverse and now he would go careering through life backwards, getting much further than if he had gone frontwards, and with fewer collisions.

The miracle of the sandbank was as nothing to this. It paled its fires completely before it.

The P.M. as he regained his health ceased to be as actively disillusioned as when he came on board. He returned to his work full of faith in himself, and fight and tact, and like a certain stalk of the cabbage family from which three crops of green stuff can be got—two sets of green buttons and one wavy green tuft from the top—having already yielded one crop of illusion-sprouts for the universal soup cauldron, he now came out rapidly in a second crop and a tuft, picked up in Greece, and tore home to offer them to his country for more soup.

Deep inside me therefore I feel that the true climax should be looked for in the columns of the daily papers which appeared some time after he got back.

To digress a moment, let me say that I thought frequently of the change fresh air and fresh scenes had wrought in him and wondered if a prominent politician in rude health is more dangerous than one in bad health.

Illusions flourish so in the healthy. A mind situated in a body which is intensely healthy finds difficulty in taking in the idea of ill health in other bodies either corporeal, municipal or political. And refusing to admit ill health, they may legislate unwisely by not taking it into account and allowing for it.

But a mind dwelling in a devitalised body, on the other hand, has strange gifts of prescience, reads deeply into the times, and has a sharp invalid's eye for dangers ahead, or loopholes or ways round.

Should then a government hold its sittings on the side of a hill, among oak-trees, where its members can fill their lungs repeatedly with pure cold air? Or should all fresh air and sunlight be excluded from the chambers where "things are done" and the legislators fed on a lowering diet and be kept shut up till they all become mushroomy and cranky and their intellects attain a size out of all proportion to their physical frames?

Optimism is an attribute of health and there is nothing so dangerous.

However, all this in no way prepares the reader for the news that Edward was all a mistake and should have been named by his godfathers and godmothers at the baptismal font, Betty or Peggy or Evangeline. For she had had five kittens during our absence, and true to her hereditary instincts, deserted them all. She was a society mother and her fluffy little kitties had to be distributed amongst the tradespeople and homes found for them in that way.

THE CAMERA

"WRITE-at-once-for-a-copy-of-the-great-new-book-entitled-*The-Road-to-Success*-by-the-development-of-our-inner-forces. This-book-expounds-clearly-many-as-tounding-facts-con-cer-ning-the-powers-of-the-human-mind-if-pro-per-ly-organ-ised-and-directed."

"Don't mumble, Patrick."

"All right, Uncle Peter."

Again after a few moments:

"It-des-cribes-a-simple-me-thod-of-control-ling-the-thoughts-and-acts-of-others. How-to-gain-their-friend-ship. How-to——"

"Patrick. What have you got there?"

"Nothing. Only a little paper book."

"It's a very bad habit to read aloud. You're disturbing me very much. I must finish this writing."

"Uncle Peter, do you think this is true, what this paper says?"

"Probably not. Never believe anything you read and very little of what you hear. And only a little of what you see."

I am forming Patrick's mind.

"But it would be so very inter-esting if it was true."

"What *does* it say?"

"It-describes-a-perfectly-easy-sys-tem-of-con-trol-ling-the-thoughts-and-acts-of-others. How-to-gain-their-friend-ship. How-to-es-tim-ate-their-char-ac-ter. Even-the-com-pli-cated-sub-ject-of-thought-trans-mis-sion-or-tel-e-pat-hy—— What's that, Uncle Peter?"

"That's another way of saying that a given person can project his thoughts into the mind of—— But it's not a thing for a little boy to bother his head about.

Why don't you go outside and play? Aren't you going to fish?"

"My line is all entangled again."

I groaned. I'd spent most of that long vacation already disentangling that line. There were hundreds of yards of it to begin with, and I believe it stretched every day. This meant that I would have to start again with the help of the chair-legs and table-legs and unwind it. Was it Penelope who spent all her nights in unwinding and unravelling things? I'd have to do it. He trusted me. What a force is the trust in the eyes of a child. Dogs, children and lunatics trust me. This will have to be my excuse for many things undone.

"Show me what you have there. It doesn't seem the right sort of reading matter for a boy of your tender years."

Patrick is eight and a half. He handed it to me.

"Where in the name of goodness did you get this?"

"Nursie bought it at the railway station."

I turned it over. It was a pamphlet on "Fortune-telling and Dream-divination," a limp, clammy green-covered thing and on the back of the last page but one a toothy young lady, with her hair down, smiled at you and called herself the "Mesmeric Wonder" and she made her declaration thus:

How I Compel Others to Obey my Wishes

Ever since reading Professor Kahn's marvellous book on the extraordinary powers which can be cultivated and brought to perfection by a study of the personal magnetism, and the psychic influences which dwell unknown and unused in most of us, I have never looked back in my career, and I have become brilliant and successful. Whenever I apply for a post, no matter how many applicants there are, I am invariably chosen. I have advanced steadily from badly paid situations to good, well-paid ones. I am never short of money. I

am popular and admired wherever I go. My health is excellent. I can control people to such an extent that I can obtain any privilege from them that I wish for, without asking them for it, but merely by willing them to fulfil my unspoken wish.

"What is a privilege?"

"A privilege? It may be anything. It's not exactly easy to describe in simple words; it's a gift in a way. A granting of something that someone asks for."

"Would a camera be a privilege?"

"Yes—in a way. Yes, you can look at it in that way if you like."

"Go on reading, Uncle Peter."

"I don't know, Patrick, that this sort of stuff is suitable for you. Auntie Celia might not like you to read rubbish like this."

"Is it rubbish?"

"Yes and no. Not altogether."

"Well then, if it's not rubbish altogether, Auntie Celia wouldn't mind a bit. She told me to read everything I could find and think it over. She says it will educate me."

"You know quite enough as it is, I think. Look at all you told me about the mollusc and the barnacles and the Pacific Ocean being due to the fact that a wedge-shaped portion of the earth fell out when it was cooling and then by whirling round and round became the moon. And all those stories about the earthworms. I think it would be better if you went out fishing. Bring me that line and I'll begin on it at once."

"But that is just it, Uncle Peter. It's when I fish that I have so much time to think. You see I've been fishing now for—let me see——"

He waved his hand out sideways to hold me silent while he thought. "Yes—five weeks now, and I've only caught one sea-bream. So you see, while I sit waiting, one bit of my brain keeps hoping that a fish

will bite, but there seems to be quite a big bit left over with nothing to do and it keeps on remembering all the things I've read or heard about. Won't you read what else it says there, Uncle Peter? It is so very interesting."

"It says:

"'Millions of people, all over the world, owe their happiness and prosperity to having read Professor Kahn's book. He studied for years in all the schools of Eastern philosophy, under the wise men versed in the esoteric researches of India, China, Japan, and from them has acquired a knowledge of the incredible magnitude of the unseen and mysterious forces which surround us and are in us, as well as of the best methods for utilising them to our advantage. If developed according to his instructions they would be of inestimable value to mankind. So great is Professor Kahn's desire that everyone should avail themselves of the knowledge he has collected, so convinced is he that its dissemination will be a boon to all, that on receipt of six penny stamps he will forward a copy post free. Money returned if satisfaction not given.'"

"It would be very funny if one could make people do things like that. But I don't suppose it's true. It *can't* be true, Uncle Peter."

As a matter of principle I never refuse to discuss a thing with a child. That perhaps is why I am so popular with children. If I were to say that what the pamphlet said was entirely untrue, I should have been misleading him, for there is a great deal in this theory of the domination of one mind over another and thought transference. Not as this charlatan could expound it, but as understood and practised and followed up by the experts, students of psychological phenomena, and mind processes in correct sequence.

"I said just now it was rubbish, but I didn't mean you to take me too literally."

Patrick looked at me. He's a dear little fellow with a rather big head and a very fair, biggish, longish, plumpish face and two grey eyes as soft and wide as mist on Irish mountains, with the loveliest clear, black, transfixing pupils right in their centres. His skin is as fine as a petal and breathing as a petal. His expression is as portentous and grave as only a child's can be.

I felt I mustn't mislead him. He's not a bit like other boys, who will only forget the truth after they have been told it. His brain worked away the whole time and it would be a pity. He would when he grew up be a man to dominate and compel respect. He had a quiet keep-your-hair-on manner with him which as a rule a boy does not obtain till he goes to a Public School. For the obtaining of which parents pay such big quarterly bills and which no matter how curiously small their knowledge of mathematics or languages, or other useful things, is a magnificent equipment for a man and brings him successfully through so much. Foreigners waste time and energy in gesticulating and talking. English Public School men bottle it up, and bottle it up. It's a reserve fund of force to be drawn on when needed. Calm determination and confidence are good health, and good health is one form of stored-up energy.

Patrick never enthused. He never would go further than to say a thing was all right. He never said more. He rarely said less. If some fairy godmother had brought him an aeroplane, boys' size, in full going order, as a present for Christmas he would have said it was "all right." And if his present had been forgotten a slight shade of disappointment would have come over his sweet, longish, plumpish, fair face, but he'd have made no audible remark about it. Patrick has a natural gift for this sort of *sang-froid.*

He was ear-marked (as they say in ministerial circles) for a notable career. A future. To a boy of his type sooner or later an apprehension of what mental domina-

tion was and could do would come. I should not care to think that he could look back and say that I had misinformed him. I knew by the shape of his commodious fair head that he would never forget anything anyone ever told him. Everything would be stored there, facts, dates, faces, names, places, tales, remarkable occurrences, or ordinary ones, addresses, things about nature or machines, telephone numbers, streets, short-cuts. I could imagine him on a wet day walking around inside his own head, sorting and docketing things, and putting them where he could get at them expeditiously when required. Expulsing something unnecessary, brought in by mistake or else sticking to something else. It was a privilege—but I didn't point out the use of the word in this connection to him—to be his uncle ; and a responsibility too. I was only his honorary uncle ; he had appointed me to the post, there being a vacancy. Celia was really his second cousin, not his aunt.

I had therefore as his appointed relative a duty to fulfil by him. The duty of helping him to form his outlook and theories. The sooner I inculcated some shadowy comprehension of the great power latent in us all the better. It grew by use. Let him then begin to use it early. There is no golf-swing like that which is induced by playing the game as a child.

"Personal Magnetism is a great driving agent, Patrick, and far be it from me to deny its existence, for though I don't think I have much of it myself, I've experienced manifestations of it often. But though I know of its existence, I can't quite explain what it is. It's probably electricity and electricity can't be described. I read a book in which the author said of a man that he was a great scientist, for he almost knew what electricity was. That is about as near as one can get to it, for the most advanced experts confess themselves baffled and say they can't define it."

Patrick nodded sagely. He is a good child and does not interrupt and he understands nearly all the long words.

"But whether it's understood or not by man, he harnesses it and makes use of it in various ways——"

I wondered whether I had better try and give him a full description of a magneto on a car, but thought of my letter and skipped it. "He uses it to drive trams and even railways, or as electric light, and in many other ways. But as this little rag of a paper says, it can also be used to drive human beings. Certain people can by mesmerising others put them to sleep and make them do certain things, by impressing their stronger will on the other person's weaker; or if you like to put it this way, the trained will upon the untrained. This is called Hypnotism, and Personal Magnetism is a form of Hypnotism. It does not put the controlled person to sleep and tell them to do certain things. It controls them awake, and wills them to do things. Understand?"

Patrick nodded. He must have done so for he waited a moment and said:

"If I was to will dad to give me a motor bicycle would he do it?"

He certainly had got the hang of the thing. I replied cautiously that that was rather a tall order. No dad who prized his son of eight and a half would give him a motor bicycle. He might feel the impulse from without strongly to do so, but his inner reason would tell him it was not the right thing to do.

"Well, then, an ordinary bicycle?"

I thought this over. He had gone very directly to the root of the matter; it was interesting to find he had done so and a proof of his big clear child's brain. And moreover he wanted to put his newly acquired knowledge to the test and get it into force if possible. But it was also a pity he had taken it so literally. He would try and fail and decide there was nothing in it. It really was a pity, for these sort of things ought to be encouraged and inquired into. It would be rather curious, I thought, and in a way a permissible ruse to tell dad all

about it and get him to allow himself to be willed into trotting up with some small object fixed upon, a musical-box or a new fishing-rod, with shorter line and a reel, or an air-gun, A bicycle would be too expensive for a soldier with a growing family and therefore not rich. But why not something else in reason ?

" If I were you," I said, " I'd begin with something smaller, because you see, if you didn't get it—and there's always a risk of that—it would be a smaller-sized disappointment to bear. If you willed him to give you something very splendid that you were simply longing to have, think what an awful big disappointment it would be. What about a camera ? "

" Oh yes, a camera ! I'd love a camera. When I go to school next summer term, it would be so useful and so inter-esting to have a camera— an autographic camera."

" Well, we'll decide on a camera."

I made a note on the edge of the blotting-pad.

" Yes, but what must I *do* ? " with a rising inflection.

" Oh, you just get the idea very firmly fixed in your mind. Shut your eyes and make yourself see the camera quite clearly. Think about it, and then at night, after you've said your prayers and gone to bed, say to yourself, ' Dad, I want a camera, I simply must have a camera, and I want it to be an autographic camera,' over and over again and think it into his mind. And when you are with him, keep on saying it to yourself constantly."

" I see," nodding.

" And then by degrees, and when he is not thinking of anything in particular, the word ' camera ' will come into his mind and he will find himself repeating it, as he thinks, for no particular reason. And by further degrees he will begin to see a blackish, darkish thing, a kind of long box-shape. He'll wonder what it is and presently it will dawn on him what it is and he will know it is a camera. And realising it is a camera, he will think what a nice thing a camera is, and how useful,

and inter-esting, and he will think to himself that you would like one, and that it would be the very thing to give you as a present."

"Yes; but *when* will he give it to me?"

I could see he had doubts, and qualms as to whether he would not have to go on for years and years, wasting valuable spare time, willing and wishing about it. So often when one has been promised something as a child, its arrival is hopelessly and utterly delayed long beyond the appetite for it. I remember, looking back, I was always waiting feverishly for something, and getting it when my desire for it had wasted away to a miserable shadow of what it had once been. Indeed, it's noticeable that this runs all through life.

I made answer:

"That depends on the strength of your willing. The harder you will, the sooner, I suppose, it will make him give it you."

"Can I will him to give it to me for my birthday?"

"When is your birthday?"

I thought it would be best to find out. We might not have time to communicate with father, for him to go and purchase it and get it sent along by the day. I knew the festival was looming large on the horizon.

"It's two weeks to-morrow, Nursie says."

That did not give one overmuch margin, did it? Better not bear too heavily on the precise date.

"Supposing I was you," I said ungrammatically, "I would only think about the camera. It's a little early to make experiments. The trying of it at all is of course an experiment, but, if you take me, the thought of the camera is a concrete thought. You are thinking of something substantial. Do you know the meaning of the word concrete?"

"Oh, quite well. It's the stuff they mix up all wet and when it dries it gets hard. They build bridges of it, with bits of iron in it."

The hand was put out, and a half turn given to it.

"Precisely. So being, as we shall call it, a definite

concrete thought, it will be to my way of thinking easier to get it into your father's mind. Whereas—and I think you will see what I mean here—the other thought about the date of receiving it is a sort of amorphous, flabby, invertebrate thought and not so easy to handle. Do you understand ? "

"Quite, thank you, Uncle Peter. You mean it is more like a jelly-fish. They are very hard to hold or pick up, and if you want to move one to put it in another place you have to get it up on your spade and carry it there in a bucket, and sometimes you spill bits of it on the way if you are not careful."

" Once more, you've said it precisely. It's a pleasure to explain things to you, Patrick. So we'll not bother to will him to do it on a certain date ; though it's quite likely that dad having once formulated the idea of the camera in conjunction with the giving of it to you will select your birthday as a suitable day on which to send it you." I always use long words in speaking to children. It flatters them. I would write a letter to Herbert and urge him to send it at once. If he wouldn't undertake to do it, I'd get it and send it anonymously and prevaricate shamelessly by explaining that the thought of the gift had precipitated itself out of the ether, irrespective of the thought of a certain giver (which was to be attached to it) through some subtle agency. If one once started these psychic messages one could hardly tell but that they might be delivered to the wrong person. The main thing was to obtain the Camera. After all, had we not read of how the Mahatmas can produce goodness alone knows what out of thin air, by apostrophising it and snatching at it at the right instant. And why not ? The air must be full of strange things, like the Caledonian Market, when you think of all the things of all descriptions which have been mouldering away, year after year, day after day, ever since there was anything to decay or disintegrate. We none of us have the remotest idea of what we are breathing. What did Shakespeare say

about Cæsar's dust serving to stop a chink to keep a draught out? I don't remember quite, but I think the same idea must have occurred to him as to the varied assortment of things the air must contain.

However, I wasn't going to rely on snatching at the air. I wrote a letter to Herbert broaching the idea, and then hunted around for a magazine or journal which advertised cameras and other forms of photographic apparatus. The big seaside bungalow was thoroughly comfortable, and staying with Celia, one is never haunted by that awful process known as tidying up which makes one's life a misery in other houses and prevents all sensible men from staying in them. Houses I have in mind where one can only smoke in certain rooms or at stated times, and where one mayn't drop ash, or can't find ash-trays, or where the hostess has a fit if one lays one's cigarette on a mantelpiece, or sets one's whisky and soda down for a moment on a polished table, while listening to an enthralling account of some big-game episode, when the rhinoceros were charging up wind to where they had sniffed the man with the gun in a tree. One smokes anywhere, any time. She even lets me smoke a pipe at most unconstitutional moments because she says I do it with such distinguished nonchalant ease. Miss Lamb says she says it is a liberal education to see me fill and smoke a pipe and that my taste in pipes and tobacco is quite perfect. In her houses there are always matches, fresh, untouched, crisp boxes—new-laid boxes, in fact. Matches on the mantelpiece, matches on the piano, matches behind the palms and flowers where you can easily find them if you know where to look. Matches in the bedrooms and matches on the chests of drawers. You need only put out your hand and there they are. Her house might almost have been the scene of the celebrated ghost story, where a man, feeling ill in the middle of the night and groping around in search of some, had a box handed to him out of the pitchy darkness by some sinister presence.

The process of tidying does not engulf them and wash them up on the pantry table where no one can get at them. If anything, on the contrary, there are more after it than before. The same with magazines and newspapers and journals. They don't arrange them on a table twenty times a day as in some houses where I don't visit now, where menials dog one's footsteps and if for an instant one lays one aside to ruminate on the contents of one article before beginning on another, or to light a fresh cigarette, it is picked up, folded neatly and put away ; or else plucked from one's hand whilst one is actually still immersed in it to be restored post-haste to the mosaic on the lounge or hall table. A way of getting on about things which makes one wonder whether it isn't a very old and a very out-of-date superstition that papers and journals are printed to be read, for I've stayed in houses where they kept three or four liveried rascals to do nothing but dance around and make it impossible for a harassed visitor to read the news and keep abreast of the times.

Here one often comes across last week's *Prattler* or *Field*, or last month's *Blue Review*, and it's quite nice if one hasn't read them yet. It was owing to this, as some people would consider, deplorable neglect of one of the great features of English country house life that Celia picked up a journal and the little green rag fell out. It was the following week after Patrick and I had gone into the matter.

She said just what I said when I first saw it.

"Where in the name of goodness did this come from ? "

I looked up at her remark. I was comfortably reading a paper, undisturbed to an extent which could not have occurred under any other roof. Thinking it might amuse her to hear the story about how Nursie bought it at the railway station and how inter-ested Master Patrick had been in it, and the advertisement of the Magnetic Girl, I told her. I also told her about the little plan Herbert and I were going to work off on

him. For once Herbert had entered into the joke of the thing; though he is addicted to a great portentousness, which I sometimes fear will develop in Patrick when he gets older.

She didn't approve it at all, for she has very strict ideas of truth, where other people are concerned. Also, I know that she likes to think that if later Patrick rises to be a great and successful man, it will be due to her patent-painless-juvenile-intelligence-development system, according to which she administers instruction to him daily.

I think it is an excellent system. I've got nothing whatever against it and I had every reason to think my little dodge was quite on the lines of her teachings and theories. She said, "Not so." I did not get heated. I'm resigned to people and their peculiarities now. I reminded myself that item eleven in my list of human inconsistencies and absurdities states that people with systems must never be expected to see things reasonably. They infallibly cast out anything anyone else has to offer. First, they fight you rings round if you find any flaw in their system, and if you adopt their methods and carry them a few inches further they accuse you of working against them. They say you are going directly against them. By everything she had ever expounded or advocated in our discussions on the scientific expansion of the child mind I was right. She had said she would balk at nothing to bring a child on mentally. She would not flinch at dishonesty. The end justified the means. No one could say what powers the human mind could not aspire to, if the early and knowledge-acquiring years were properly used. It was vitally important that children should not learn things mechanically or dryly, but made to think, think, think, in the intervals of being made to play, play, play, and eat, eat, eat. The present way the thing was approached made everything so monotonous and unappetising and was so exhausting with its long hours spent indoors during which the children were crammed

with indigestible information, that they left school, subconsciously revolted and with mental indigestion permanently ensured. They left, convinced that to think about things was bad form. They were overfed with unsuitable things unsuitably administered instead of being taught to search for the information they liked best with appetite. A modern school child's brain was, regretfully be it said, in the same condition as the liver of the Strasburg goose, that goes, distended and dilated, to make *pâté de foie gras*.

She pulled me up and disapproved of my ruse not, therefore, for its want of honesty, but because she roundly declared there was nothing in personal magnetism. There was, for all that people claimed contrariwise, nothing established either by psychologists or physiologists that could not be flouted. The phenomena claimed as evidences of its working were all only in existence in the minds of journalists, craving for copy, or novelists. Neither of which if she were an autocrat would be allowed to deal out long articles about it or mawkish novels asserting it was a decided thing. These people she'd sweep away with other unnecessary trash. They started the wind-bag theories and then they floated all over the world on green rags.

Now I am a considerable believer in it and think there are many kinds in quite palpable evidence about us. I am not psychic, nor magnetic, nor have I read or troubled much about such things, but I believe the two conditions exist. And if I believe in a thing I'll talk about it, and if I talk about it, I'll warm up to it.

"I'm surprised at your narrow-mindedness, Celia."

"Then you're easily surprised, for you're surprised at nothing at all. I'm not narrow-minded. If you said you were surprised at my broad-mindedness it would be nearer the mark, but perhaps you don't know it when you meet it. That's very likely. Why, good gracious, you seem to have forgotten, my dear boy, that *I* cured *you* of narrow-mindedness which of all the seven deadly sins is indeed the worst."

"Amen," I said fervently.

"No, but I am surprised at you not taking this miserable effusion from the child and burning it." She rolled it up into a ball and threw it cleverly into the waste-paper basket over by the wall.

"Why do you deny the existence of this power so energetically, Celia?"

"For various reasons. Why do you declare its existence so energetically?"

"For various reasons too. How do you account for the manner in which some men rise from nothing and carry all before them, if it's not through possessing it? They never make a mistake, or, that is, they don't appear to, for their mistakes are either accepted and swallowed by those around them or else turn out well for them. Mistakes which would cause other men to founder and go down will float them and wash them up on to some high place from which they can look around and plan some more mistakes which will place them still higher. Their success is not due to intelligence. You must look for the reason elsewhere. You can't account for it except by assuming that they hypnotise or magnetise their colleagues into thinking well of them. Consequently they do well. That's what it must be."

"It's because they work hard and don't waste time in writing that they succeed."

One for me.

"Nothing of the kind. I can't agree with that." I passed it over. "If you haven't the indefinable quality of which I speak (we'll leave what it is an open question if you like), which is going to make you succeed, the harder you work and the more you slog at it the lower it will bring you. Everything you do, the more it will carry you down, because whatever you do will turn against you. It may be the right thing for a man in certain circumstances and with certain liabilities or abilities to do, and it may be the right moment to do it,

but because he does it it's the wrong thing. By Jove! it's most interesting, I must say. I could think and wonder, wonder and think about it all day and half the night. There's no end to it. Everywhere around you you see people, and if you watch them you can see the thing going on. People starting with everything, money, position, influence, backing, throwing it all away bit by bit, while others who have every disadvantage to strive against, get up and up and up."

"You spend too much of your time thinking and wondering. If you moon about thinking and wondering you'll finish by thinking you're thinking when you're not, and wondering at things that don't exist. You're over-civilised, my dear boy, that's what's the matter with you. You want to get back to nature more."

"No one is in closer touch with nature than I am, and I maintain that Personal Magnetism and thought-transference do exist in everyday life. And talking of surprises, it surprises me that as a woman you are not fully alive to it. I could understand a man not perceiving it, but not a woman."

"Are women then supposed to be more magnetic than men? It's the first I've heard of it."

"So it seems, and it strikes me as odd."

"Why odd? Why odd? Why should women be more magnetic, more skilful, or any better at casting their influence, or throwing it around and about, or whatever way it is done, to people?"

"Yes, they are, and the reason is obvious. They have had, whether or no, to develop it. A man if he wants a thing goes out into the world and takes it, whatever it is: position, money, sport, influence, experience, or we'll even say—love."

"Oh, love——" said Celia, as if she didn't like the turn the conversation was taking and looking at her watch.

"Yes, love. You don't realise that very few people

seem to give it as small a space in their lives and minds as you do."

"Yes. It's extraordinary. Very few people seem to see what a useless, hindering thing it is. Go on."

"The man can go out and take it, but women have to sit at home, within, and let it come to them. They have to draw it to them, but it must all be done *sub rosa*. You know yourself that a woman who lets a man see she likes him is considered to have made a hopeless exhibition of herself. A man looks a bit of a fool if he goes after a woman who won't have him——"

I paused gloomily. Celia looked at her watch again. I went on.

"So the girl or woman has to sit still and silently and secretly exert all her mental strength, and all her force of will, under the cloak of a perfectly impassive demeanour, to draw the man to her, willy-nilly. She may not let him SEE she wants him, but she must make him FEEL she does. That just says it. She must show nothing on the surface. She even seems quieter than usual very likely, but she keeps on calling him silently and telling him to hurry up and not lose any time. She keeps on telling him how delightful she is (silently). She keeps on pointing out how beautiful she is (silently), and how splendid it will be for them both if only he will ask her to kiss him (silently)."

"Of all the preposterous ideas, Peter! You certainly get hold of odd, and even scandalous theories. I've never in my whole life done such things as you describe. Never!"

Celia looked exceedingly annoyed, and genuinely irritated at the thought of the things I imputed to her sex.

"Not you. You've not had to. You're so beautiful that you've always had scores of admirers. You've always mixed in a society where men are as numerous as the pebbles on the sea-shore or stalks of wheat in a wheat-field. You've had every advantage that a liberal education and travel and great wealth can bestow.

You've always been independent, and free to go where you wished to, to do as you would. I'm speaking of the woman who has been chained at home in a place where the women preponderate, one of several sisters and a batch of female cousins, to say nothing of other friends, all on the look-out. A woman, in short, who has had to battle (silently) for the stray man who happens to wander alone and unprotected into such a place, and therefore falls across her path ; she has to try to wrest him from a dozen or more magnetic girls who are also drawing him silently and forcefully to them."

"I don't believe such things happen."

"They do."

"They do, do they? But how do you know?"

"I know quite well."

"Hoo! It's easy to say you know," said Celia disdainfully, her lip curling, "but it's nothing but morbid nonsense."

"It's NOT all morbid nonsense. I know quite well, and I'll tell you how I know if you like."

"How?"

"I know, because I've been battled over myself!"

Celia sat up in her chair. She had been lounging carelessly before.

"*You've* been battled over? You've been battled over like this?"

She looked at me incredulously. I nodded and shrugged my shoulders and there was a few minutes' silence. Presently :

"It's easy to say you know because you've been battled over, but how do you know it's so. It can't be proved."

"Can't be proved. I like that. It was proved to ME all right, over and over again. I can tell you that, and that's that."

"When, might I ask, did this—this—battling—for you take place—and where?"

Her tone is one of calm amusement as if she were

humouring a child, but couldn't spare too much time for it, as presently she must be off to see to something important, such as writing urgent letters and such-like, instead of frittering away her time in desultory conversation.

"Ah! Now you are asking."

"Oh, ages and ages ago, I suppose when you were a big gawky overgrown sentimental greenhorn, frightfully self-conscious and always imagining that people were thinking about you all the time when they weren't troubling themselves in the very least about you. As if they hadn't better things to think of!"

"Not ages and ages ago at all. Quite recently if you want to know."

"Quite RECENTLY—really—how very amusing!"

"Yes, quite recently and quite—continuously."

"Quite CONTINUOUSLY. How do you mean quite continuously?" looking at me with interest and a colour dawning in her face and eyes.

"Oh, hang it, Celia. You do ask a fellow to dot his 'i's' and cross his 't's.' When I say quite continuously I mean quite continuously."

I got up and went over to the fireplace and stood with my back to it, plunging my eyes into the end of the room.

"You mean it goes on all the time wherever you are. Do you mean that?"

"Yes, if it goes on all the time more or less, I must be somewhere, so it's wherever I am, naturally."

"Naturally. That was a silly question to ask." She was sitting up and seemed to be thinking.

I lit a cigarette and flung the match into the logs, putting it out with a jerk of my wrist.

"You spend a good deal of time at my house, Peter. Might I ask if any of the—battling—goes on there?"

"RATHER. It mostly happens there. It happens of course at other houses, but principally at yours. Oh yes."

"Principally at mine. That's funny. I've never

noticed it, nor can I see why it should happen principally at my house."

"Why, the thing explains itself. You have such a tremendous lot of friends. Your house is a regular meeting ground for all the nicest people. Dozens of pretty girls come and go and there are more opportunities for that sort of thing to occur. And not only have you a lot of charming friends already, but you are always making more. Look at Nancy now. There's an addition if you like. She's perfectly adorable. There's no chance of getting bored with you, dear lady; your circle keeps on getting bigger and bigger and nicer and nicer—thanks to your hospitable bent of mind."

I puffed away at my cigarette as if this were something to cheer and hearten one up.

"Well, one lives and learns, I must say," said Celia slowly, looking at the wood fire.

"That's quite certain. And this battling teaches one things, I can tell you." I went over to my chair and drew it nearer and sat down again and looked at the fire ruminatively. "It's perfectly extraordinary. Sometimes," I said confidentially—"sometimes I've had the feeling that if we were properly developed on the lines that were laid down originally, and if this affair of the thought-transference were gone into properly, that speech would be totally unnecessary. For I can assure you that sometimes, when they are—battling—I can almost hear them asking me to go over——"

"Yes——"

"And kiss them."

"YOU DON'T MEAN TO SAY SO. But how awful!"

"No, no, it's not awful when it's spoken silently as they speak it."

"They—who?"

"Oh, whoever it is. It may be this one, it may be that one. There's no knowing."

"I think it's perfectly scandalous!"

"Come, come, Celia. That's rather severe, isn't it? After all, it's only nature, you know."

"I repeat, I think it's perfectly scandalous. Might I ask you if there are a great many of them?"

"That's not easy to say. It varies, but I don't really think it is ever much below twenty-five or thirty or so. I meet such a lot of people, one way or another."

Celia looked at me in a new odd sort of way. She'd an expression on her face new to me, anyhow. I think she was slowly formulating an idea to herself that if twenty-five or thirty people all wanted me at the same time I must be a desirable fellow. There must be a something about me.

"Are you quite sure that this feeling about the—the —kissing—emanates from them entirely? Don't you think it may, that it's very likely it's only your own morbid mental outlook which is responsible?"

"Dear me, no. I feel it sometimes come over to me when my mind is a perfect blank, and full of other totally different things. In fact I may be standing with my back to the girl or whoever it is, quite at the other side of the room, not bothering at all, talking to Professor White or someone on bimetallism or science, or something of the sort."

"Yes."

"Well. And suddenly without any warning I get an odd unaccountable feeling that if I am not very careful I will be compelled to go right over and kiss whoever is sending the message to me right on her jolly little mouth."

"It's AMAZING!! I never thought such a thing possible. But are you *quite* sure that the idea doesn't come from yourself, or partly? I don't think any girl would think these things unless she knew she'd be encouraged. Do you mean to say that of your own accord you'd never have thought of it at all?"

"Sure as sure. Though sometimes——"

"Yes—what——"

"I don't say, mind you, that it leaves me altogether cold—that I don't react in some sort to the summons. It gives me a sort of warm pleasant glow in my

chest. It is rather nice to feel one is appreciated after all."

Celia, three-quarter face, is looking at me, and swivels a beautiful darkling eye in my direction.

It seems then that slaves may escape sometimes, after all, especially if they get help from outside. She was silent for a full minute or so. I smoked. There is a great deal in thought-transmission. I could hear her doing quite a lot of thinking. However, when she spoke she affected unconcern of the most marked description.

"You talk very decidedly and glibly about these messages and I suppose I must accept what you say, but the whole thing is nothing but guess-work, working back from logical premises. You know that a great many silly women, far too many indeed, spend their days in pursuing any moderately decent-looking man who happens to be about, and so when you find yourself in a room with one of this type you just jump to the conclusion that she is after you."

"I assure you there is no guess-work about the transmission of the messages whatever. I've received them over and over and over again. Talking is child's play to it; languages are the clumsy and inexpressive expedients we use because we have not perfected a system which is within our grasp and which is infinitely superior to speech. Words are unscrupulous and inefficient middlemen in the commerce of life. They either express too much or too little. This other way, the absolute utter thing itself flashes clear and straight, without any unnecessary trimming, to its destination. To see what useless and unsatisfactory things words are you've only to pick up a daily paper and read a Cabinet Minister's letter, explaining that he really meant one thing when he said quite the opposite a few days before. Or step in to try and patch up a quarrel and hear what each side has to say, and find that, according to the persons quarrelling, the whole thing has arisen out of the looseness and want of clarity of

words, which may be taken first one way and then another. Wars arise through words being misunderstandable. In thought-transference there's none of this."

"There's something in what you say," said Celia vaguely, looking at the logs, "I must admit."

"Why" I said, sitting down again, and warming to my subject more and more. "By this system which I advocate you don't receive a partial and unsatisfactory fragment of an idea—you get the whole thing flashed before you in a complete picture!"

"What sort of a picture do you get, then, when people are—battling—over you?"

"It depends. I will say this, it varies a good deal. Some girls seem to have the gift of putting things more clearly before you than others. With some you get the entire picture of wedded bliss and intimacy."

"Oh, they want you to MARRY them."

"Yes. That's the idea. I don't suppose they'd go to all the trouble of projecting their thoughts to one for less, though—— However, as I say, in some cases you get the entire picture—the fireside, and the snugness—and the—er—intimacy—and—oh, all the usual trimmings of connubial bliss."

"By the fireside"—said Celia, looking at the logs; "and very intimate——"

"Oh, very. And so cosy." I looked at the logs too. "All the wedding presents, dotted about the room, and photos of pals with signatures and so on, and little odd things bought during the honeymoon or the engagement. Some girls seem to be able to work in more details than others——" I tailed off casually.

"More details. What sort of details?"

"Oh, various. One girl always succeeded—just as I expect she tried to—in making me see her with her hair down."

"Her hair down!" echoed Celia horrified. "I don't call that at all nice."

"Oh, wasn't it just! She'd very pretty hair,

fluffy and wavily soft. I don't say I ever really saw it down or anywhere near it, but she MADE me see it quite plainly. She used to wear a pretty, becoming tea-gown sort of thing too—in the picture. Mere words could never have brought it before me as she did by her thought-transferenee. It was vivid."

I shook my head reminiscently, looking at the little crackling jetting wood flames.

"It seems incredible!" said Celia, shrugging into her chair and getting nearer the big logs as if to warm herself. "However did she do it?"

"Well, now that I come to think of it, in her case it was done by a trick of the voice—this is a very usual way, I may say."

"But I thought you said it had nothing whatever to do with talking. You see you say first one thing and then another——"

"Nor had it either. She didn't talk about it or mention it or anything. This girl hardly ever talked to me at all. I don't think she ever did so. No casual observer would have noticed anything. No, but when she was talking to other people and I was in the room a portion of her voice seemed to detach itself and come floating over to me to tell me all sorts of things, such as this about the hair and the tea-gown, quite quietly on its own, while the rest of her voice was talking and laughing to the others, about anything, tennis, or dances, or just the usual everyday things one talks about. And even if I got up and went into the next room that bit of her voice seemed to come after me, and follow me and keep on telling me things—such as I've just told you about. When it gets to that pitch, hearing a girl's voice when she is not there, it's beginning to get dangerous."

"Dangerous. You mean——?"

"It means that the thought has effected a lodgment. It will stay with you and rankle even when she is nowhere near, and keeps on and on telling you all sorts of things until——"

"Until?"

"Until you propose, and she accepts you as she meant to all the time. And your doom is sealed. You're done brown."

"Everything's settled then."

"Everything's settled then. Yes."

"I must own," with a self-conscious laugh, "that you've stirred my curiosity. You simply MUST tell me who some of the girls are."

"It wouldn't be fair, Celia. You know yourself you wouldn't think any the more of me if I did mention names."

"I won't tell. And besides, we're such old friends, and I never gossip."

"Can't be done, Celia. I could not love thee, dear, so much and all that. You know the quotation. Besides I hardly ever think of them as individuals. With my analytical nature, I divide them into types."

"Ah. You only think of them as TYPES," faintly relieved, I fancy.

"I won't say that altogether. Hardly that. But though they impress themselves individually on me, I cannot help, with my mania for classification, dividing them up into sections. There's what I call the always-waiting-for-you-round-the-corner girl; I've very little use for that sort. I choke her off as soon as possible. And there's the always-evading-you-round-the-corner sort. She's much more attractive. One wants to go in pursuit and while she is with one she manages to work twice the damage the other one does. And I've noticed that she very often transfers messages to a person who is in one house when she is in another."

"Oh, by telephone, I suppose."

"TELEPHONE! Nothing so crude, I can assure you. No, by thought-projection entirely. Many and many an invitation I've had to tea and dinner that way."

"I can just imagine the sort of girl," scathingly, as though to ask a nice man to tea were the last thing

any decently brought-up girl should stoop to, even if she does it inaudibly.

"Then there's a very dangerous type I'd like to warn all my pals against. Two or three—oh, several —come to Grosvenor Square quite regularly, I'll go so far as to tell you that."

"I'll look out for them," said Celia tonelessly.

"How shall I describe the way they set about it? They like to be thought quiet and shy and deliberately look countrified and affect the startled-fawn air. The wild woodland nymph, unversed in the ways of men and cities. They are dangerous and no mistake. They are of course quite slim and medium-sized and part their soft brown hair in the middle (there's a clue for you) and do it up anyhow as if to make out that they know nothing of the arts of fascination, or if they did that they wouldn't stoop to them for a minute. And some of the soft brown hair brushes down carelessly over their foreheads and eyes, and they look up at you from under the shadow, timidly, flicking their long eyelashes. Vanda, at the top of her style in the old days, was never a patch on this sort. She was open and above-board. These are surreptitious. They have little creep-mouse, creep-mouse ways. If ever you wanted to do any reforming——"

I waved my cigarette suggestively.

"I should think they needed it badly."

Her lips were in a straight line.

"Well, I'd really like to describe these girls to you very carefully, for then you would set to work on them at once, or else avoid asking them to the house. They do lots of damage, believe me, just because no one would suspect what they were up to, except a man who was the object of their magnetic machinations. I won't give you any names. That would hardly be fair. But once you know the type you cannot mistake them. They have a little quiet casual way with them as if they forgot where they were sometimes and came to with a start. Day-dreaming. Awfully fetching when it's

real. I've often thought I'd like to marry a girl who day-dreams. But they are very scarce and snapped up at once. But this creep-mouse girl gives a very good imitation of it. She never seems to be quite listening to what you say or quite sure of what she is going to say. She never seems to quite notice you are there, no matter how close she is to you (she gets very close to you quite by accident). She never quite looks at you, just snatches her eyes away off you, and looks beyond you out of the window or somewhere away off. She half looks at you and half smiles at you and half laughs if you say something funny. She begins to say something, stops and goes on—but never gets more than half-way through—she never finishes anything off—except her victim. She has an appealing look about her and she has little-lonely-orphan ways with her. And the picture she projects into your brain is quite different from the fireside one, but really more dangerous."

"What is it?"

"She makes you see yourself in deep woods with her, carrying her over a swift-flowing stream. You have picked up her little slender, airy-fairy form in your tweed-clad manly arms——"

"Wait a moment. That recalls something to me. What was it? Oh yes. Years and years ago I found an old yellow-back novel——"

"Yes, that's right."

"And there was an incident like that you've just mentioned——"

"Quite right. I read it too. It was published about twenty years ago, and the idea of the stream and the tweed-clad arms swept from one end of the country to the other as soon as it came out. Picnics were given on purpose near swiftly running streams. Quite amusing." I heaved a retrospective and cynical sigh. "All the matrons banted so as to become airy-fairy little ladies so as to be carried over streams and the men always wore tweed. Well—well——"

Celia inhaled slowly and exhaled slowly—the subject was exhausted, but she wouldn't let it drop. Then :

" Are there any other types besides the ones you've mentioned ? "

" Oh, they win in all forms as the saying goes. Talking of being surprised and that sort of thing, you would be surprised if you knew all the ins and outs of it. The most unlikely people. Why, we were talking of matrons just now——"

" You're not going to tell me that some of the elder women—— It's bad enough in the young ones, but really, Peter—— ! ! ! "

Celia looked really *awfully* horrified.

I thought better of any further admissions I was about to make. It would be base to confide to Celia that I had not once but often enough had wireless messages from some of her most respectable and housewifely friends in whose plump matronly bosoms one would only expect to find a few innocuous and necessary housewifely secrets, just as in a comfortable and capacious old family sideboard are kept a few household oddments and condiments, the biscuits, the decanters, the raisins, or the cruet ; a dish of nuts and one of rosy-cheeked apples. As the simile floated before my mind, with a rush I seemed to remember how I used to unlock one of the compartments of the one that stood in our old house to get a biscuit and a glass of port or old marsala ; and I remembered the wonderful aroma that these imprisoned delicacies together with the old mahogany combined to produce therein. The recollection called up far-off days, and for half a fleeting instant I drifted away, far from the subject we were discussing.

" Surely, Peter, you are exaggerating ! You must be exaggerating ! "

It would never do to rob her entirely of faith in her own sex and far be it from me to suggest that the aforementioned rosy-cheeked apples should bear even the

remotest resemblance to forbidden fruit. So I said hurriedly :

" I don't mean the married ladies. When I said matrons it was only a figure of speech. I meant just odd oldish matronly looking spinsters and so on."

It would never do to let her think that the matrons who came to attend solemn drawing-room meetings or social welfare work ever let their attention wander in this reprehensible way.

" Yes, just odd spinsters," I continued.

" Spinsters."

" Yes."

" What sort of spinsters ? Fat spinsters ? "

" No, no. Not Miss Lamb. I know what you are thinking of, but she is far too busy and nice to bother her head about such nonsense."

" I'm glad you put it that way. It is sheer, undiluted, ridiculous and unnecessary nonsense. It may possibly serve its purpose with the very young, and be nature's way of bringing man and maid together. But on the whole I think it's complete nonsense, utter nonsense, and now that I come to think of it I believe I can prove it to you. You are always declaring your undying affection for me, aren't you ? "

" Yes, indeed, yes ! And if only you'd——"

" Let me speak. And if there is as much in this magnetism as you claim for it, how is it that you have not magnetically persuaded or compelled me to give in to you before this, and marry you ? "

" That is a leading question, but I can answer it completely. I am so occupied in warding off the danger that assails me on all sides that it literally absorbs all my magnetic force. If I were to let go for one instant —or relax in the slightest degree——"

" Yes—yes——"

" I'd be lost. Someone would snatch me and run off with me ! Don't please think I'm vain, or that I am grossly exaggerating, but you can't think what narrow squeaks I've had. Phew ! I sometimes feel I am in

daily, almost hourly danger, especially at the height of the season when I am going about a lot. I sometimes wake up in a cold perspiration. Some girls have such strong wills. And when, as is sometimes the case, they are reinforced by the mother—well—a wretched weak man doesn't stand a dog's chance. I feel I never know what mayn't happen. Heaven send, if I am caught, that it won't be a creep-mouse, creep-mouse girl, for I'm really frightened of that sort!"

I ran my hands through my hair distractedly at the thought.

"I hope for your sake it mayn't be. If there's ever any real danger of it let me know and I'll—I'll marry you myself, just to save you. I can quite see what an awful thing it would be to happen to any man."

"Thanks, you dear thing. I always said your heart was in the right place."

"I think it would be a good thing if I were to revise my visiting list."

"My dear Celia, that would be useless. I'm not a vain man, really, but the next lot of girls would try for me just the same. The mere fact that I am supposed to be your property, body and soul——"

"Supposed to be——"

"Yes, supposed to be." I shrugged my shoulders in a "what boots it" way. "It makes them twice as keen to get one, you see. Think what a feather it would be in the cap of one of your women friends to suceeed in luring me away from anyone so wonderful and altogether delightful as you are!"

"One of my friends! I shouldn't care to call that sort of person a friend of mine."

"If you allowed a little thing like the ownership of a tall man with crisp slightly wavy hair to come between you and your women friends it would be a mistake. I'd never allow a little thing of that sort to interfere between me and one of my men pals."

Celia didn't make any specific answer to this, but got up saying something about the very important letters

she had to write. I don't suppose she did very much writing. I think instead she sat down again as soon as ever she got up into her own room and thought the thing out in all directions. Certainly she must have concluded that if what I had described really "went on," that the sooner Patrick developed his psychic forces the better, so as to be able to guard against those designing women. She said no more disparaging things against our little trick; seemed indeed to enter into it.

So the camera duly arrived in time for Patrick's birthday, and when he got the parcel, opened it and saw the contents, he remarked phlegmatically: "It's all right."

THE PROUD WOMAN

THIS is a very cynical story, and no one who has not lived in a small country place would understand it, and therefore shouldn't bother to read it. Also it has no *dénouement*. That is, none has occurred as far as I know, but if one should, I'll write another instalment.

It was the third Friday in the second month of the season and this is always reserved by Celia for what she calls her snob party. She invites all the most perfectly formed snobs she knows, jumbles them all together with a small leaven of ordinary people and then she and I and a few others who appreciate them go in among them, move about and gloat over them, converse with them and introduce them to each other, and take them down in batches to minister to their wants among the urns and the bon-bons.

The people who get cards for this annual party don't know that they are specially picked on account of their snobbish tendencies, nor of course do the people asked to leaven the mass know what they have been asked to meet. The card does not say:

"Mrs Carmichael invites you to a snob party."

It simply says:

MRS CARMICHAEL

AT HOME

(*date here*).

4 to 7. *Music.*

I bar at homes, even Celia's. I won't turn up on her second Thursdays nor her second and fourth Wednesdays, but I come on the third Fridays of the second month of the season, for there is genuine healthy amusement to be got out of them, and from the student of character's point, genuine profit, as the types collected are worthy of the minutest study.

I don't know what will be thought of me when I confess that third Fridays were originally got up specially for my benefit ; not to amuse me or interest me, but to instruct and reform me and to bring to my notice what an awful thing a perfectly formed snob is. Celia will have it (and I've given up arguing the point with her) that I once was one myself. Let that pass now. I'll have more to say upon that another time. But granting for the moment that I had been one, an afternoon spent at one of these parties would certainly have gone far to cure me.

The two big rooms were almost full, for there was a tremendous lot of these afflicted creatures gathered together, in one or two cases several from one family like a truss of grapes.

A truss of snobs is a pulverising thing to encounter and the amount of horror with which they can invest the ordinary simple matters of life, walking, breathing, eating and drinking, talking or being at all, is amazing. The complications with which they can surround themselves and their functions and pursuits and doings is beyond description. Everything they do is a solemn surcharged matter to be got over in a certain way. There is an appalling number of things you must not do and they must be *not* done in a certain way. Their omission must be conducted in a certain way. There is also an appalling number of things which you must do, and of which the doing leaves you hardly time to be born or grow up or to be buried in any comfort. And almost everything you do must be accompanied by certain cryptic utterances.

These vary up and down throughout the country,

sometimes much, sometimes little, but nearly always a good bit.

Though occasionally the same utterance—or omission or commission or by-law—will obtain and run through several counties even though some distance apart, and crop up sporadically.

This promised to be an unusually interesting party, for I was to renew my intercourse with an old acquaintance from the country, who was entitled to every consideration that could be accorded to her in that gathering, for beyond the ghost of a doubt she would be supreme in it.

I mean she was far and away the greatest of that kind of person we had assembled there. Her markings would be the most perfect there; she prided herself on her manifold perfections and didn't know how glorious and complete they were and how far removed from what she thought they were.

It was five or six years since she had received me in her house. I was younger then, but still greatly on the look-out for human beings with peculiarities of character or ruling passions in strong possession; or ones unconsciously obsessed by or persuaded to some unreasonable idea of themselves without justification; or ones of a curiously workaday sanity combined with the harbouring of strange delusions that one so often sees in human beings and leaves them totally incapable of measuring their own worth against the worth of those about them or the value of anything that is anybody else's.

I had been greatly struck with the atmosphere I encountered at the lady's house. It was almost as chill as marble, and breasted you with almost as cold a solidity. It was almost as private an atmosphere as it was in the house of Mrs Mountjoy, but it was also fraught with something more blighting and sinister. The Mountjoy one was not sinister. It was merely private. It was not an atmosphere which would suspend one's animation or affect one more than temporarily,

but by going to Mrs Hex's house one ran the risk of being permanently and unfortunately affected. It was an atmosphere inimical, nay deadly, to real thought or genuine aspirations after any of the realest things of life. Suppose you were the sort of person who had inclinations to blossom into little buds with possibilities of future growth, of ideals or leanings towards the very big things that really matter, to go in there and sit for a little time was to run the gravest risks ; it was almost certain that after an hour and a half in there, if you were to examine the buds you would find that they had all become dry and withered owing to the peculiar blighting qualities in the air of that drawing-room. And it might very well be that your natural and seasonal buds of decent endeavour would be nipped and quite spoilt for a full year and their blossom and fruiting postponed by that much time ; if not a great deal more.

What I mean is, that if anyone let fall a remark betraying an honest interest and enthusiasm in man or his works, or made a remark dealing with a world problem, or voiced a hope that sooner or later a better way would be found for solving some of the problems of human misery that surrounded one so constantly, it would call forth a series of chill sneers about one's absurd views which left one wondering which of the two, she or you, was mentally wanting. By all accepted standards one of you must be right and one of you wrong. Which was it ?

I didn't stop to ask myself after once or twice of it. One good glance at her little intolerant eyes and her loose old hard mouth was enough ; she could not know much of anything with that face. Indeed if her little eyes saw anything at all she would have hesitated long before she mounted the look of insolence she habitually wore on a face that was already as homely as a face very well could be. To its owner four-fifths of the world would be absurd, though the Higher Powers she worshipped of a Sunday had decreed that they should be.

There was the usual smell of a country drawing-room, added to a faint whiff of carpet that comes from one when it's laid on a floor on ground-level without cellars underneath, so that some slight smell of dampness comes through from the earth underneath. Thus you get a permeating suggestion of the texture of the carpet, jute and wool combined, or whatever goes to its making (this carpet's pattern was conventionally drab and small; nothing to trip over, dislike or admire in it; very well swept, very well laid. It had come from an emporium and looked it). A smell came in too from the tidy and uninteresting garden, and a bit of commonplace turf that lay outside the windows, surrounded by a few clumps of dry-looking trees. It was an arid-looking garden and yet there was a house only just across the road where the turf grew around it as green as emeralds and the trees bent down as if to admire it.

I drew in the air and breathed out again slowly. I detected in it a feeling of desiccated, attenuated authority; quite overpowering no doubt to those who might have to live under its ægis by force of circumstances; but poorly petty in quality to anyone coming in from without, sufficiently free and world-wise to estimate it properly.

One felt immediately in it a daily observance of small boring rites and deadly intelligence-sapping duties performed to the stroke of a lonely-looking clock in the bare hall, not old enough to be noteworthy as a true antique or young enough to be cheerful and reliable, but by whose statements as it rapped them out the occupants of the house lived drearily.

Not far off was the village church, substantial and uninteresting. I wondered if what I found in the atmosphere could be due to stray bits of clerical narrowness which had come waddling across the road to mingle themselves with the suggestion of carpet and earth and turf and satin bazaar cushions, and reminders of much-used, well-cleaned chintz.

Or was what I observed in it due to the inevitable blight and mouldiness that falls upon everything in a small district where the inhabitants are so tied that they cannot spare much time to get away and travel, or possibly can't afford to go about and get amongst much-travelled people, and clear up their minds thoroughly—I tortured mine, I remember, trying to make out what was the difference in the atmosphere from so many other atmospheres. Was it what was in it or what wasn't in it that made it so peculiarly awful ? As a connoisseur and person interested in the differences and distinguishing qualities of divers atmospheres, and as one who had genuinely studied them and would go miles to inhale one, if he heard it was of a new and interesting kind, I had not put my nose ten minutes across that threshold before I knew that here was a very distinctive one and one I would study with avidity and think over and which would richly repay me. I have a trunk full of notes about it (I am barely touching on what I observed here) and pages of psychological analysis and rooting and searching for first causes and antecedents and deciding factors and inherent tendencies and operating effects to explain that atmosphere and what ailed it (for it was sick). I finally got it down to a small piece of paper, though the searching and comparison and conclusions and marshalling of facts and addings up and subtractings and allowings for, and prognosticatings from, and working back from and jumping over a place where a bit of evidence was missing and the explaining why it was missing and what led me to fill it up in the way I did would have filled two trunks. They must see the light one day for they are worth reading ; quite a human document. It's absurd to attempt to confine it to a few pages.

The final conclusion that I sighted and grasped at and succeeded in safely escorting through all those notes and questionings was this—that it was an awful atmosphere, not so much for what was in it, but for

want of what wasn't in it. It was awful because of what it lacked, for it lacked everything. All the elements that ought to go to the compounding of an atmosphere in a house were lacking. I saw that. And later I saw that they had all been deliberately set aside. Hope, faith, charity—poor devils—had gone first (I proved this by a very minute linking up of information I had garnered), then humanity, interest, naturalness, kindliness, tolerance.

There was nothing in the place but one poor attenuated idea, for as yet it had not waxed fat and sturdy—that at all costs the inhabitants of that house must be smart. If anyone had come to the hall door and on asking for admittance had been seen by the parlour-maid (they didn't run to a man in those days) to have about his person anything real or pertaining to real life, she would have shut the door in his face. Those were her instructions.

I was very careful when I called (as I did frequently, for the proper classification of that atmosphere had developed into an itch with me) to dissemble any latent realities I had about me. Fortunately my manners and appearance are such that I think they help me to cloak such undesirable things. When talking to my hostess no one would have suspected me of having any more depth than a pancake. She would have shrunk aghast from any perception of a depth, so I was very careful, exposing nothing but an as-it-were pancake surface to her, all width and circumference and no depth. I never let her even know I had depths, for a glimpse of such a thing had an uncanny effect on her. It frightened her into a series of violent sneers. I say frightened, but I really don't know if this should be the word used, but it lets her down gently. She disapproved of depths as they were likely to get in the way of a worthy middle-class woman struggling bravely on and on towards smartness. A very hard road indeed for a woman who is unbeautiful and no longer young and not clever and is hampered by small means, and

the fact that her husband is obliged to work for his living.

To admit the existence of depths would certainly hamper her. But I didn't run away too positively with the idea that they frightened her. I made two notes to the effect that I thought that for her there were no such things as depths. That they only existed for her as the tag puts it about ghosts: "Ghosts are things nobody believes in and everybody is afraid of." I don't think she was really aware of them. She was only aware of heights, social heights to be climbed. With the illogical mind of the snob, she thought heights could exist without depths, and to her these spiky heights were the only real tangible things in the world.

True, there were poor, for they were at her door, but to a person minded as she was they would appear all part of the scheme of things that was to give her her position; that it was only fitting that the Almighty would always keep a reasonable supply of poor people dotted about at a convenient distance so that ladies of her patronising turn of mind should drive about in high dog-carts and pull up at cottage doors, summoning those from within to step out, whether soapy or not, and have words of admonition issued to them from a long sallow face inclining down to them.

At first I was not very graciously received. She knew I was a barrister and this I think she considered not quite good form, basing her comparisons on petti-fogging country solicitors who came menially and hat in hand to draw up a will and so on. Her own husband, I say, worked for his living, but his doings were cloaked in obscurity. He put up no plate. He worked in mist, no one quite knew at what. I did, but that is neither here nor there. But one fine day I heard a whispered talk between her and Celia and I caught the words "Blenerhassett of Castle Maynard." Celia was instructing her as to who I was, and from that moment a change came over her and a sort of rancid affability

came my way. Until now she had thrown her remarks at me, and I know chid her husband for encouraging me. She had never looked me in the eye—my feet, knees, waist, chest and nose had come in for her glance, but never my eyes. But after this she reached for them with her eyes (the lids of which never came up properly, and cut her look in two, and always showed a good deal of white like a nappy horse. I couldn't see her ears, but they must have been set back if they matched the eyes ; they were tucked away under her spare red hair battened down S.O.S. fashion).

After that I could come when I pleased and drink in the atmosphere and get nearer and nearer to a solution of its strangeness. In the end I sympathised with her ; a woman who was nobody struggling to be somebody is a sad sight really and she was very plucky about it and stuck to it splendidly.

I then had the run of the house, as I say, and in according me this she felt, I knew, that she accorded me a weighty privilege. To me, outside the chances it gave me of analysing the atmosphere, the privilege meant little or nothing, coming as I did from great places and having the run of many in comparison to which hers could only be compared to a neglected pavilion in a corner of their grounds, built to a caprice or a fantasy, or to overlook a special glade. I say, without *arrière-pensée*, that to me it was just an ordinary detached country villa in need of paint or mortaring—with a garden of fair suburban dimensions and a field or two beyond.

But that was how it first struck me, before I began to see it through her eyes. What she had lived in originally or sprung from I don't know, but it must have been very small, for by degrees as I saw her house through her eyes I began to see it as a vast and imposing mansion ; for I have this uncanny faculty, that if I stare at people a good deal and remain with them some while, I begin to see things through their eyes. It is a very odd accomplishment, and it is beyond me to say

what it is or how I got it, but I get curious sensations through indulging it. So I found that though it was an ordinary house of, say, seven bedrooms and two or three sitting-rooms and the usual kitchen premises and offices, she considered herself to be living in a vast palace of a place. Figured herself as a princess or a person of some very high degree installed in echoing, capacious state. The rooms were of a reasonable size and reasonably high I'll admit, and the house had a certain pretentious something about it and succeeded, like its owners, in looking bigger than it was. It had a good deal of entrance to it and an approaching path which aimed (or seemed to) at making one suppose that the house would develop and swell outwards at the back more than it did ; but it didn't. I found when I had the run of it that it didn't. I'll say this for it, it was a degree larger and more commodious than the houses just about, but they were poor and quite lacking in any modern conveniences and amenities.

She received me in her commonplace house as though it were Chatsworth and Blenheim and several other historic mansions rolled into one. Her vanity was so considerable that it oozed from her and coated all her belongings, disguising them completely. If she had received me in a tumbledown garret she would have expected me to be smitten with envy and amaze at what I saw. After I had been going to her house for a bit I almost felt myself seeing it as she saw it, though she never really imposed her view of herself and her things on me. If I saw them as she did it was entirely due to my gift of seeing things through other people's eyes. But what a shock it would have been to her if she had had my faculty of seeing through others' eyes ! She might then have seen it, insignificant as I did, simply little better than a gloomy semi-detached villa, abiding in an almost desolate corner of the world.

It must be understood that the mantle of glamour she threw over her dingy dwelling was not of the same kind that Charles Lamb's old friend the sea captain

cast over his home and effects and by which the poor room in which he received his friends was unutterably dignified and the almost meatless bone he set before them on a bare table became a rich juicy joint, laid out amongst bright cutlery and crystal on fine white napery. That glamour was laid over all simply because the giver wished so much that he could offer his friends of the best, that everything he set before them became glorified by it.

Her point of view was different. On the contrary, she rarely felt the guests were equal to receiving the meagre hospitality she had to offer and she offered it grudgingly in consequence.

More and more I saw as I went from time to time to her house how this vanity of hers encompassed all her doings and her belongings. Adelaide Mountjoy regarded her things as sacred because private, but she did not claim any superiority for them over other people's things, for she was quite a humble woman. But to my friend here every object in her house or that she wore was vastly superior to what anyone else wore or had in their houses. Her hat was better, her coat, her piano, her card-table, her maid, her watch, her pigs, her tulips, her form at bridge, her rhododendrons, her trap. Anything at all. Any little bit of rubbish she handled or used seemed to be bursting with importance after it had been laid out of her hand. Her dorothy-bag used to shut with a self-satisfied "snap!" when I've seen her take out a small silver pencil she carried and make one of her dull methodical notes on a bit of paper and put it back. Her scrawling notes are alive with it. I've one by me now and I'd only have to hold it in my hand and shut my eyes to feel what its owner is.

I've sat waiting for her to come down, and as I inhaled the atmosphere looked around and noted the signs of it in the furniture. It's ridiculous to say inanimate things are inanimate. As long as a dominant personality to which a thing belongs has force to live and breathe, whatever they own will be imbued with

their spirit. I've seen inanimate things die after their owner has gone, so I know what I say is true, and no one would contradict me if they had once sat in that lady's drawing-room waiting for her, and held communion with the chairs and footstools and other things there.

The footstools sat themselves down complacently on the floor with their lugs more in evidence than is usual elsewhere. There is always a certain complacency about a fat footstool even in the best-regulated houses, but these squatted insolently right in the way of everyone's progress, blown out to their seams with self-importance so that their lugs stood right away from their sides. I never understood the phrase "putting on lugs" till I saw the footstools at that lady's, and I saw at once then how much it may mean. The sofas looked smugger than I've seen them elsewhere, and the uncomfortable chairs of no fixed period stood around at attention, prepared to receive people of good birth and position with frigid politeness, and people of neither with as much forbearance as they could muster, and only strictly provided they came in to kow-tow, or discuss matters in an official capacity, such as the doings of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Bumble Bees, or the local blanket society. Had anyone of humble position ensconced themselves on one of these chairs otherwise than upon such an understanding, I think their pseudo-Sheraton-cum-Tottenham-Court-Road legs would have given way with indignation. It was unlikely it should occur as the greatness of the lady had got abroad. The furniture was not alone in its admiration and appreciation. My hostess had not, maybe, my gift of seeing with other people's eyes, but she had a gift as good in its way, that of making others see with hers. She considered herself important, therefore the people about her considered her important. Consequently she was important, in that small place, among those small people.

It is the most astonishing endowment this of being

able to cast a glamour over one's possessions, no matter how ordinary, just because they belong to oneself. In some cases this overpricing may arise from not having access to fine things, so as to form judgment. I fancy it was a little bit this in her case, for it was rampant in the vicinity. Indeed the atmosphere of the house was not altogether without a certain relationship to the atmosphere you met in the roads there and in and out of the other houses, but it was very, very much more marked, for it also sprang from something that was innate in the lady herself. I've seen it in plenty of people who had all the opportunities possible for being broad-minded and for measuring their things and themselves who still made this mistake about them.

It must not be confused with a gentle contentment, the contentment of a mind which is either naturally simple and pleased with simple things or else has been led to simplicity through a surfeit of all the magnificence of the world and an appreciation of how little it means really as compared with that way of life which leaves one time to be, and to think.

These two I can understand, but I simply cannot grasp the workings of the minds of people who are puffed up with conceit at their worldly possessions, and their position, when they own—nothing—are—nothing.

I grovel in admiration before this attitude.

It is as perfect, as sublime, as the Taj Mahal.

I wring my hands to think that I shall never achieve it. It makes beauty a drug on the market, intelligence a thing to scoff at as useless, education an encumbrance, and humility a laughing-stock.

The possession of an income is a complete superfluity, and what arrested me in my friend's case was that here I saw a purse-proud woman who had no purse. It was delicious. She had every symptom of inflammation of the organs of pride touching this point, but, as I say, she had no purse. She rattled her bangles and flaunted her skirts and ordered us all about and laid

down the law as though she had ten million behind her when all the time she had ten million nothings at all, and her purse was as thin as a newly milked udder.

By the way, she was generous, I found, and this is the place to record it, so it goes down here. Had she been able to give away any of this fictitious wealth, the ownership of which puffed her up so much, she'd have done it willingly enough, but as it existed only in her imagination she was unable to detach any of it to give it away, so it remained to accumulate indefinitely and swell her pride still more. But she did what she could, I'll own.

Her delusions about her house and her great wealth were only on a par with her delusions as to her appearance. She thought herself a very fine, personable person indeed.

I had not been going there long before I discovered that I was expected to be impressed by her figure. It had never at first sight seemed to me that she had a figure or should have pretended to one. Her formation seemed to me ordinary, inclining to heavy, though of a fair height. But before long I heard whispers. There were whispers about her "figure" in the neighbourhood. I heard them again and again, and though at first I disregarded them, I ended by attending to them, and before I left her "figure" seemed as much part of the neighbourhood to me as the substantial uninteresting church. The other women who were allowed to form her circle allowed it to crop up in their conversation from time to time. At bun-worries they stated things about it as if a lot depended on it, some admitting it, and some denying it. They seemed of two minds about it, sometimes saying it was good, other times saying it was bad, but always solemn and careful in what they said about it, picking their words, even if they contradicted themselves over what they said last.

Whether admitting it was good or bad, they all used a phrase that struck me as ungrammatical and not meaning anything. They said it was a "made figure."

I took this, after thinking it over, to mean that Art stepped in where Nature failed, though whether to subtract or add to I didn't see. To substract, I think.

After I'd been there some time I found myself referring to the figure in conversation though really it didn't interest me. It was a poor figure, made or unmade, I don't mind telling you as a man with an eye for such things. It was stiff, and braced unpleasantly, but since conversation was at a low ebb in the days I used to visit there, and new topics were not hailed with enthusiasm, I insensibly found myself referring knowingly to Mrs Hex's "figure" in conversation and then letting whoever I was speaking to carry on without me, while I listened and admired the amount of discussion that could be got by the denizens of the district out of a thing that existed in their imagination only. One was so completely of the inner circle there if one spoke of Mrs Hex's figure, and I remember being present on an occasion when a new-comer who had taken a house in the neighbourhood was first introduced to the idea of her having a "figure." He denied it entirely and refused to admit it. And yet when I came back on a short visit two years later I found him talking quite learnedly about her "figure" as if it were some national institution, or at any rate an institution indissolubly connected with that part of the country, and a sort of landmark, like the blasted oak at the four cross-roads.

I hadn't very much luck when I discussed her "figure" because, thinking that if I agreed with a person over it it would please them, I'd always speak of it according to what I remembered hearing them say when the subject was last on the carpet. But I always chose the wrong line, and said it was bad when my *vis-à-vis* had decided to think it was good and good when she had elected to think it was bad. I never once got it right. I always went by what I had last heard them say, but evidently in a little place where they have only got a few things to think or talk about they hold different views about a thing each time they

mention it or else they'd go mad with the monotony of it.

It wasn't very easy to converse down there and ingratiate oneself, certainly for a man of the world who was not used to being picked up at every few words. In the big world of course it is an understood thing that one always knows a shade less than the person one speaks to, and *vice versa*, and one is delighted to meet someone who will make good this deficiency. That is the form of politeness that is held to in large societies and makes them so agreeable, and that is what one misses so greatly in the small societies or country places sparsely inhabited. Down there they didn't allow much to people coming in, and they truly thought they knew more than they did. It was only possible, I found, to get along by admitting—no matter how untruthfully—that you knew nothing. You must never say a thing was—neither must you say it wasn't. It was best to begin by asking them was it, or wasn't it. And then go on carefully, and if, even by following their admittings, you got to a place where the subject opened out and where you might have to admit or disallow, it was better to attempt nothing on your own but instantly to call in their help. I became almost popular that way. As popular as anything could become there that wasn't of it and up to it.

All this was part of the drawing-room atmosphere, by the way, too.

I decided to fathom the superstition of the lady's figure and left no stone unturned to try and do so, and find how it had arisen. It was quite by chance, and nothing to do with my own endeavours, that I found out. One day I was bidden to a garden party at the lady's and there I met several peculiarly large and shapeless relations both male and female. When perambulating dutifully around the herbaceous border with first one and then two of the more massive of them I fell to it at once how it had arisen that Mrs Hex had a "figure." In comparison to theirs her figure

was almost normal (only almost), and occurring in a family whose figures were so abnormally bad, she at once took prominence as a prodigy of shapeliness. Their talk as they examined the peonies, and afterwards the pigs, was all of Mrs Hex's figure and its excellence. I was asked—they stopped in the gravel path and faced me out—to say what I felt about it, and I was quite at a loss to reply, and led them to the strawberry bed. I was very interested to find that here was the source of the idea. I was getting a little bit anxious about myself and wondering if I couldn't trust my eyes aright, for it was odd, I had been thinking, that so many people should be witness to its excellence and I not be able to see it. I am often rather nervous when I find myself up against a good many people in the holding of a contrary opinion, and though I knew these were people who didn't knock about much or get about to learn things, I still felt worried about it.

So I saw her once more as she really was and as I had first seen her to be before the accepted idea began to lay hold on me too.

I had been waiting for her to come down and watched her enter the room. Undoubtedly her "figure" was bad; and undoubtedly as regards her members the proper order of precedence in so doing was not held by or observed as Nature had originally ordained. How to couch it delicately? In a properly constructed figure, built according to Greek ideals of anatomical perfection, the nose should enter the room first, but in her case the member which, according to Æsop, rebelled against its fellows took upon itself the right to come forward before the nose, thus setting all rules aside in the matter. It only won by a short neck, but win it did, entering first and the nose following after.

Apparently the forces that were called in to assist to make it a "made" figure were powerless to teach this rebellious member better manners and what was due to the lady's nose. The result, too, of this error of

bearing was heightened and added to by certain other peculiarities—natural to her though as part of her character and as such not peculiarities perhaps. From her great desire to mix only with people above her, she had to be very careful to shake off her old friends, and in gathering new ones only to encourage the advances of those who were placed above her, so in any encounters with acquaintances or new friends or people on approval there was in her greeting and subsequent non-committal intercourse and parleying the presentation of a three-quarter face or just more than side with the whites of the eyes much in evidence, and nothing of a smile. She extended her hand in a way that told you that the lending to a person of two of her fingers for a moment did not constitute a pact of friendship. The remaining three would only be yours if you could prove satisfactorily that you were her social superior and that she could profit in something by your friendship. As people carry no illuminating labels as to parentage, income and advantages of present position, she was chary from top to toe; at a breath ready to face you fully if something by chance showed that you were what she was after; or, if some chance showed you were unsuitable, ready to reverse instantly and to show you her back. So there was always an askewness about her owing to this. I had seen it for long enough to get the apprehension of it thoroughly. By chance it was some time before she was made certain of me. I could easily have declared myself, but I prolonged the doubt deliberately so that I could get every shade of this about her observed, and felt that she was so ready to turn to or turn about, according as something cropped up to show whether I stood above or below her, that I hardly knew whether she faced me or turned her back; in our intercourse there seemed such a backwardness about her front, and such a frontwardness about her back, owing to this, that looking at her one felt dizzy. This indecision of hers as to which way to move left as it were a permanent shamble in her gait which, added

to the insubordination of her parts I've already mentioned, gave her a poor carriage.

Besides this doubt of whether she was going to face you or show you her back, I remember (before she knew I was a Blenerhassett of Castle Maynard) that I felt there was this about her. At any moment she might develop a great lopsidedness by suddenly and unaccountably growing a large cold shoulder of exceptional and disproportionate size and present this sideways to me. This helped to make her awkwardness more marked and gave her a something of the same capricious and ungaugeable bias you get in wooden bowls as you trundle them across the green. Neither back nor front were quite in abeyance. Both were to hand.

So much for her figure.

All the askewness vanished for me when it was discovered that I was a Blenerhassett of Castle Maynard and that my people had been lieutenants of their county a full three hundred years before our meeting, apart from anything they had been before. Also I was a mine of information on sport of all sorts and she had every use for me on that account. It seemed that now her husband's unobtrusive money-making left him enough leisure for her to contemplate the thought of making him a stepping-stone in more ways than one towards smartness. Nothing is more removed from sordid money-making and trading occupations than the sporting smart set, so she had decided that though it was late in life to do so, and he had no real aptitude for it, she would make her worthy husband into a perfectly formed sportsman.

I gave her her head and we had many a long talk about the various forms of sport (sport is a thing which I prefer above all else the world has to offer). I put her on to good agents for cheap moors and rough shoots, and I remember we actually laughed together once (she would unbend and crack a joke with a superior) as we discussed the advisability of taking a deer forest

with a limit of four stag, for the worthy man, we felt sure, would get all the healthy exercise he needed in stalking one of them ; for he'd never get near any of them, and it would be all the same no matter how many there were. A deer forest was a deer forest, whether it carried four or half a hundred ; and the kudos lay in the idea of the deer forest.

I explained how the season for the salmon varies in different rivers and told her something about the flies required, and told her the life story of that noble fish, and explained how incomprehensible its habits are, and how difficult it is to read the mind or the appetites of the finny world. I spun her long yarns on the susceptibilities of gillies and their management—and their entirely unconcealed contempt of novices.

I gave her a small insight into the enormous number of unwritten and almost unspoken laws that hedge about almost any form of sport and must be understood and observed if one would not look an utter fool—and render it almost imperative that if one embarks upon sport as an amusement one must practically give up everything else or remain in the ruck for ever. For where is the use in doing things by halves nowadays, when the standard is so high in everything ? It's choose this—and give up the others—or nothing.

So "*va pour le Sport.*"

She was an apt pupil and never forgot anything one told her and I could see that to her soon no river would exist or be worth mentioning in geography unless it harboured salmon or trout. The busy rivers that accommodate wharves and docks for the teeming industry of big dark towns or turn the mill wheels that grind the corn into white flour, and then run on through fields and bulrushes, faded away as though they had never been. The names or heights of mountains that had no heather stretches on their slopes to nourish grouse and so didn't echo to their harsh kecking as they got up and whirred off were not worth recording. We eliminated all these and mapped out the whole country

into a perfectly formed sporting-snobs' paradise. I half thought of bringing out a volume entitled "The Sporting Geography" after we had gone into the matter and finished with it. If everything useful was omitted, it might have sold well.

Her conversation began to take on a new tinge. Odds and ends of culture and a little half-hearted knowledge of one or more foreign languages were set aside. I told her they would be quite useless in the world she was about to take by assault and she would already have so much to remember that it would be useless to cumber herself. That sort of thing too would be looked at askance (especially the languages). It was only the highest of the high, or the innermost of the inner, who could permit themselves lapses into culture, and then only in the odd intervals left over by sport. This would not leave time to perfect oneself even in a small degree, so why waste time, tissue or mind-space or anything on it. She was a little nervous about the extent of her culture and feared it might betray her, but I was able to reassure her completely. A man on a galloping horse wouldn't have noticed it, I told her. So she spoke from now on only of huntin', shootin', fishin'; of horses, dogs, spaniels, and red-setters, gillies, guns, snipe, woodcock, wild-duck and rocketing pheasants.

Everything else was scrapped. She submitted a list to me, and I drew my pencil through the whole of it. Some of the accounts of the scenery that had struck them in their annual holiday abroad and which had figured with stereotyped enthusiasm in our talks were cast into limbo too. The Italian lakes and Swiss scenery and the Tyrol were certainly part of the outfit of the ultra-smart set in the early twenties, but by that time they had already filtered down into use among the well-to-do bourgeois and had already been scrapped as any part of their equipment long before that by the people who counted. Enthusiasm over lake-sides, crags and fells and wild scenery had died for ever with Byron. He and his lot were the last of a set who

followed a fashion already on the wane and which was only the remains of the grand tour idea ; the itinerary undertaken by young rips of good birth when travelling was difficult and expensive, and when part of a noble young rip's fit-out was excessive and painstaking immorality combined with lapses into dishevelled despair at his own blackness succeeded by fits of excessive sensibility and quoting of poetry.

That was of the past, not a second later than eighteen hundred and twenty-five at least, and if she were to embark on a career of smartness she would have to be more up to date than that.

I primed her in any such lore of what to, and what not to, as I had at my disposal. It was a disgraceful act on my part, but I am incurably mischievous. I wish to goodness I had had it well whacked out of me at school but I always seemed to fall into the hands of people who aided and abetted me in mischief, wherever I found myself.

After coaching, some days I'd try her. We'd have a test conversation and I'd try to interest her in other things. But she only seemed to be able to get her tongue round the words "woodcock," "salmon." "gillie" and the rest, but she would talk quite freely on an article on the best method of gaffing a salmon that she had found in *The Field, the Country Gentleman's Newspaper*. I'd tell her a moving incident I'd read of in the life of the sea-bream and be snubbed for mentioning such a common fish or an explanation of the migratory habits of the eel family, but nothing doing ! She relapsed into sulky silence.

Together we chose two or three sets of sporting prints, some old and some modern, and she swept aside a few Madonnas and sea-scapes and a water-colour of the Castle of Chillon at sunset, all of which I very much suspect were purchased *en bloc* at the same emporium as the carpet, at the time of the lady's marriage.

I delight in holding intercourse with snobs. In an age of materialism they are so immaterial. That is,

they float so beautifully in air, or else they swim in pretence, like last year's gooseberry in sugar and water. They deny so much (everything that's real) and affirm so little (except a few odd things about woodcock and trout and who's who). It is simplicity itself to be a snob in thought, and though there may be many tedious things about it in practice, such as remembering not to smile at the wrong people, or to extend your hand to them, yet the mental blankness and peace of mind makes up for any bodily exertion. All vulgar problems about work disappear; with them also, as if by the wave of a wand, people connected with work disappear. The world is thinly populated to the snobs, for they only see superiors. Their inferiors disappear and obligingly mingle with the other parts of thin air; they may breathe them but they don't see them.

People toil for them and spin for them, make furniture for them and steer cargoes of grain to be consumed by them across the sea, but they don't acknowledge their existence. They deny all the graduations that place them where they are and anatomically-anachronistically they draw sustenance from nothing, like cherubim and seraphim, who only fly about and continually do cry, without having any muscles to agitate their wings or organs to pump the air to the vocal chords or circulation enough to feed their brains to induce the vocal impulse.

Circumstances kept me there for some time, and took me back and forth at intervals. Not very long—a couple of years, I think—after the plunge had been taken in favour of the bold attempt to become members of the smart set, I heard undercurrents of talk. I felt there was something in the atmosphere a little different from what had been in it last time I was down. A sort of fullness. I noticed it but didn't quite take in what it was. There were one or two new topics (fresh for there) since I'd left eighteen months before and I thought these constituted the difference and caused the feeling of fullness, but I found out I was wrong. I

saw they were only subsidiary undercurrents, and by seeing that I got on to the main undercurrent.

The word "jewels" came into it. Naturally. I might have known. These would be necessary as part of the expeditionary force, and now I recognised that the word had taken its place in the accepted vocabulary as though it had always been there, alongside of woodcock and wild-duck and salmon, and salmon trout, gun, gillie, rod, and chestnut thoroughbred, and so on and so on.

It also had entered into the little vocabulary of the little sequestered place (on the main line), and at tennis and croquet parties and at half-past-seven dinners or at the Vicarage sale of work the word went round.

"Jewels."

I met it, too, at one or two minor and therefore more cheerful and natural dwellings, at which our lady did not visit, but where she was eagerly discussed, though to her these chatelaines were only part of the material she drew into and expelled again from her lungs as being inferiors and therefore part of the air. I visited them, for though I look exclusive I'm not, really. I never refuse to visit at people's houses because I think they are my inferiors. I only refuse to visit them if they bore me.

All sorts of things were said about them, but not too openly. No one was out to give it away that they were interested in the "jewels" to the extent of discussing them or impressed by the fact that the lady's worthy husband was going to give her "jewels."

They all guessed the reason of the gift first go-off. It was not so much a gift to her as to himself. In a household like that a disinterested and casual giving of presents could not have been afforded, as making no show. Here was just a man giving himself a present of "jewels," the noise of which would get bruited about (and magnified too, in the telling of) and would procure him consideration when they broke out of their shell —as they were fully determined to do. No one knew better than the worthy man how much these things

count for in a progress through life, and how useful it is in getting forward to have a wife to deck in this manner. Our English sumptuary laws are rigorously enforced as far as men's attire is concerned. A man cannot on his own person make a display of his solvency but he can by means of his wife's. He knew to a tittle what an important matter clothing is. In the office of the tannery in which he worked as a partner, if it were a question of a rise in salary between two clerks running neck and neck, he always gave it to the better suit of clothes. He remembered he had been chosen himself for a position of responsibility by the firm for which he worked so obscurely because he had always known enough to buy the right sort of collars and had a decent quiet taste in tweed.

The women all guessed this (what is there a woman won't guess ?) but didn't say anything about it.

For a time the " made figure " was dropped as a topic and no one got heated or pronounced magisterially or deliberately (choosing her words carefully) anything about it one way or the other. For a time no one went away from a tea-party and asked herself had she been too heated in her pronouncements on it, as to whether it were " good " or " made " or " wonderful " or " too heavy " but still " very remarkable considering " ; they came away more inclined to wonder if they had shown too much interest in the matter of the " jewels." If the men talked of the " figure "—there were about five and three-quarter men in the neighbourhood, or if you counted in the Vicar and the doctor and his assistant, about seven and a half—they talked of it among themselves. The women were too occupied in discussing the " jewels." Afterwards the seven and a half men were to catch the infection and to begin to talk about the " jewels " too, but not in the precise, price-list way the women did.

Their advent was not immediate. I came and went twice before they came.

It was mooted, for it was not by any means a settled

point yet, or by any means nearly settled, whether the "jewels" would be purchased from the Army and Navy Stores (after careful consulting of catalogues and a trip to London) or whether they would be purchased from one of the big silversmiths', goldsmiths', and cutlers' establishments that line Regent Street on both sides, and who also deal largely in "stones" and other things of like nature. "Stones" were very much inclined to crop up in the conversation; a light-hearted and knowing way of referring to the subject, made use of by the more up-to-snuff ones, who were convinced of the advisability of making the purchase in this form instead of taking them over entire. These places, they said, should be made to show what they had and from a large quantity certain "stones" worthy to link up their destiny with that of the lady might be found. And worthy too to enter into the social life of the district, which consisted of at least four or five dinner-parties in the season and at least two or three times that number of tea-parties. It was a gay place. They said so and I dare say they knew.

I didn't offer any suggestion. I had found that for any outsider to make suggestions was a fatal proceeding. You were only received down there, as I've said, on your humble acknowledgment of complete ignorance; that you had arrived at the well-head for all information on all subjects and were ready and thankful to fill your empty gourd and depart.

Especially to depart.

But when finally the "jewels" did make their appearance (after months of talk had preceded them like outriders or emissaries) I felt sorry I hadn't spoken. The sum the worthy man had paid was totally disproportionate to their scintillations. He had been grossly overcharged. He had, just as I expected he would, chosen badly and overpaid on top of a bad choice. There wasn't, for all the preliminary talk on the subject, what you could truly call a "stone" among them. He'd paid two hundred per cent. too much for a lot of

heavy silver mounts while I had knowledge of a nice little sealed package of really good stuff, clear shapely diamonds and a few good pearls of lustre, going for a song: a portion of a big estate to be realised at any sacrifice, as the legatees were abroad and too rich to be bothered about the legacy and wanted to close the legalities surrounding it.

I had my first view of these additions to the social glitter of the place one night I dined there. They had just arrived, I'd heard, sent down in some very square and some very oblong and very accurately tied, nailed and sealed packages, registered to their full value. I was an early arrival (a bad habit of mine) and as I waited I looked around at the spindly supercilious furniture and it seemed to me that the chairs, the sofas and footstools seemed to have more smugness about them than usual. I'm sure they had.

I sat in the drawing-room in the summer's evening light and it was just thinning a bit but not yet perceptibly failing. I kept an eye on that furniture. It seemed very full of itself that night. It seemed to be saying: "Diamonds. You'll see diamonds to-night. Mind your eye. They're very bright. After this we *will* be smart. Just you wait and see. You'll get a surprise. *You* don't have a chance of seeing *this* sort of thing every day, I can tell you ! ! "

For some reason that night that furniture annoyed me. It got on my nerves. I could have kicked it round the room with pleasure. Though, goodness knows, I ought to have been used to it and made every allowance for it. But that night it was worse than usual. It talked to me as if I'd never been anywhere, never seen anything, never heard anything, and didn't know anything. It was galling ! It patronised me, and condescended to me, and I felt absolutely at a loss there in the face of it. You can't argue with furniture. I felt entirely powerless to point out to it that there was very little I didn't know (and that at any rate I was ready and willing to admit I didn't know if I didn't).

That there were not many places I hadn't been to, or houses I hadn't the run of, or many societies that didn't know me, or in which I wasn't received gladly and made welcome, very welcome, or in which I was not the life and soul of the party, in fact. I was at home all up and down the country—London, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, the Continent! How dare they put on these airs with me in the way they did! What did they take me for? How dare they think a handful of off-colour ill-cut sparks on a commonplace self-important woman would impress me! I who was familiar with bejewelled peeresses and close friends with American millionairesses who could sheathe themselves in pearls and diamonds from head to toe if they would but wouldn't. I who had hob-nobbed—and still did, occasionally, low be it spoken—with some of the brightest queens of Bohemia, blazing with wonders, and had noted on them simple strings of pearls the price of which could have bought out the owner of this house I dined in and turned all these self-sufficient chattels out in the road.

I went for one of the sofas: "You great big smug fat thing. You may think you're everybody, but you're not. So there!"

I turned to one of the chairs and apostrophised it:

"Why, you squinny, badly chosen machine-turned copy of a bad transition-period chair, what do you take me for? I'll put you in your place. Don't you know that I am perfectly at home, the honoured guest, in houses where you wouldn't be thought good enough for the butler's pantry or the housekeeper's room? You've not moved about enough. That's your trouble. You think you're everybody because you happen to swell it around in a little potty neighbourhood where tuppence-halfpenny looks down on tuppence, and neither of them can realise the existence of half-a-crown or five shillings and would die of heart failure if any one mentioned the sum of a hundred pounds in their presence.

"You don't know enough to come in out of the rain.

And that reminds me. A good shower of rain would do you a lot of good, and wash some of the dust out of your eyes. I just wish I could take you to some of my friends' houses. It would soon take the stuffing out of you. Why, you go on as if you belonged to the most priceless and unbroken satinwood set known to connoisseurs, with medallions painted by Angelica Kauffmann herself and your seats upholstered with the identical original covering of the period made of hand-woven Genoese velvet or seventeenth-century brocatelle. As for that writing-table over there, it couldn't give itself more airs if it were the actual and only one specially made to the order of King Louis the Fourteenth by the greatest artist of the time, with ormolu mounts such as were never seen before and which took years to design and make. Believe me, the most unique pieces at Hertford House don't blow themselves out with nonsensical pride and tit-uppy tomfoolery like you, you miserable bits of spurious Chippendale and pseudo-pish-tush Sheraton!"

Pah!

I was quite unnerved by that furniture.

But it didn't pay the slightest attention to me. It didn't listen to a word I said. It wouldn't believe me when I said it was ordinary and common. It thought I was mad.

It had seen and heard so little; so limited was its experience that it couldn't grasp what one told it. It had literally no material to go by in forming its judgments. It thought it was lovely.

Whatever it did or didn't think of me, it made me no back answers. It just looked past me at the door expectantly, waiting to see the jewels.

"Diamonds!"

They entered.

I almost heard the sofas, chairs and cushions say "Ah-h!" all together in a sort of hoarse horse-hair chorus.

She and I advanced to each other. She carried

them on her front and in her ears. There was a slight conscious awkwardness in the moment for us both.

I was the first to see them installed.

She knew I knew she had them on. I knew she knew I knew she had them on. I knew she expected me to be impressed by them. She didn't know that I knew a thing or two and thought nothing of them at all.

I knew she didn't know enough to know anything about such things and that she didn't know enough to know how little she knew either.

I knew that though I knew they weren't any good she'd never guess I knew it, because, as I say, she didn't know enough herself to know they were no good and therefore couldn't know I knew it.

Her loose old mouth was drawn together in a simulated unconsciousness and, as it were, in a fine dismissal of the matter as trifling. It was weighty, yes. She admitted this—she had to—but it was trifling to one so accustomed to deal in largeness as she. It was inclining a bit to a twitch. The mouth, I mean. She was repressing it with difficulty. I fumed inwardly. I don't know why, but that night I felt like telling her things, *true* things. Other nights her delusions interested me. How unreasonable I was! If she hadn't delusions, should I ever have troubled to go near her? No. But to-night, unmistakably, I wanted to tell her things, as to how potty all her things were. It was too bad, and it annoyed me to see her there in such a stew about so little, and striving for calmness. Still if they were really a step toward smartness, she and they would find their level anon—when the steps drew nearer to within reach of the goal. How alarmed she would be when she found the standard she was up against—unless she were blind. How inadequate she would find her income, and even her imaginary millions. But I think she was blind—luckily for her.

The "jewels" had only been in the house these forty-eight hours, but if you'll believe me, they'd already

come under her spell. They had taken to her as a duck takes to water. They were full of themselves. No sooner were they under her roof and under her hand than they had caught the dodge that pervaded the whole house and everything in it, and simulated something far vaster than they had a right to. They were already making themselves out to be larger and more costly than they really were. Regardless of their inferior cutting and water and clumsy setting, they blazed and sparkled impertinently and arrogantly on her.

They and I hated each other at first sight.

The other guests put in an appearance all in a state bordering on excitement. They were agog to see the "jewels." Up to now there had been no jewels worthy of the name in the neighbourhood, a few cameos, a rolled-gold bangle and an engagement ring or two, but not "jewels," using the word in its fullest sense. I believe, now that the thing had actually happened, they considered it was a good thing. The nieghbourhood might justly be considered to have gone forward by the coming of these "jewels" among them. It had lacked something before, perhaps (heaven and I only knew how much it lacked), now it might be considered complete. They were all about to shine, free of cost, in the reflected light of these "jewels."

Nothing of course was said. The lady knew of the excitement. She knew what she had done for the place and its inhabitants and that she alone could have done it, but she was of a kind that did not dodder under greatness. These people must be made to see, if it had escaped their notice before, what her mettle was, and that greatness did not ruffle her, or cause her to turn a hair. So nothing was said, but everything was thought, and glances plucked at the pieces, crossed, and bumped each other and were guiltily pulled away.

The diamonds presided at the table, giving tone to all that went on. They behaved well; the stars (of course they'd chosen a cluster of stars) not dropping off

into the soup, and gleaming there as one sometimes sees a star gleaming humbly yet exquisitely in a roadside puddle, towards evening. They shone athwart the courses and allowed nothing to dim them. They were fully satisfied with their niche in life. Now they would have the satisfaction of looking down on their diamond-betters. Had they gone to a simpler woman she might have infected them with her humility and a consciousness of their want of worth and their flaws.

The whole place tickled me to death, and everything in it—excepting the furniture, and real bad blood existed between me and it. It was as though one saw the ambitions and follies of the great world repeated there, and one looked at them through a diminishing glass, so that it was a case of—*reductio ad absurdum*. One saw how futile things were, take them for all in all. I could have cracked my sides laughing. The excessive solemnity got me in the raw. Every movement that transpired in the large cities or centres, whether at home or abroad, found its way little by little to this sequestered spot. By the time it had got there it had got pulled about, and arrived garbled, and left more garbled still. Post-impressionism, art nouveau, spiritualism, rinking, the tango, the craze for antiques, rock gardens, auction and pirate bridge, any odd thing.

The worthy man sat at the foot of the table. He wasn't really a proud man—but he couldn't help, as he looked up occasionally and the diamonds caught his eye, being impressed by what he had done, and the importance of the occasion.

There was quite a certain amount of talk that night. As a rule in a place like that there isn't much ; one must be conventional in the country. One dare not not be conventional, and conversation is a deadly thing. One's tongue runs ahead of one and then goodness knows what dangerous topic might not be started, for like a little disobedient fox terrier it goes off, gets out

of hand, plunges into coverts of thought that are taboo, and puts up heaven only knows what sort of conversational game that must on no account be hunted or discussed.

In discussions too the danger was that one might say something that the other people thought to be wrong, and as no one quite knew what the other people thought about anything (nor indeed they themselves, as they hardly ever searched in themselves to see what they did think or believe) it was risky, for one might wander about and say something broad-minded and lie under a cloud for it for years after.

But to-night, at any rate, everyone knew what everyone else was thinking about. They knew they were each and all thinking about the jewels. They ate and talked of other things and kept trying to get an idea of what they were like, out of the corners of their eyes. No one would have dreamt of looking at them frankly and admitting they admired them or of saying quite naturally: "Hello, Mrs Hex, you're very smart to-night! What's that you've got on there. Some new baubles, eh?"

Never. They would never have dared that. Perhaps as time went on, in six, seven, eight, nine or ten months, or eighteen months, or two or three years, they might venture to notice them, and hear little anecdotes anent their choice, and the wavering as to what to select (Mrs Hex seldom wavered, but I think she would admit to having done so for this once) or something in regard to their valuing for insurance. But it was too close to the great occasion get. They—and the lady herself—would all have to be allowed to get used to them by degrees, to accommodate themselves slowly to the big change they foreshadowed for the neighbourhood—its awakening to social prestige and importance all due to these jewels. One or two of the women were, I fancy, wondering whether, when "jewels" like that were asked to dine, it would not be better to say eight o'clock instead of seven-thirty for seven-forty-five

as now was the custom. Certainly those "jewels" demanded an eight-o'clock dinner, if not eight-fifteen —if the servants would stand it. There were three outside couples and one extra man and they would share two cabs going home; had probably shared them coming. They would discuss all this in returning in the seclusion of those very stuffy country vehicles.

It mustn't be thought that the lady was not a very remarkable woman. She was; for alone and almost unaided she had kept the district from making any real progress. She imposed her obsolete ideas upon it, making fun of anything new or useful. Shooing away anyone who came there with ideas which might if carried out make the place go forward. As it was, she found it just comfortable in the matter of openings for patronage leading to certain small social recognitions, for ladies of little manors such as she. There was, as I said, a nice serviceable selection of poor people scattered about. Just enough and far apart enough so that their rounds could be made in a high dog-cart comfortably in an afternoon.

There were various little ineffectual and innocuous organisations too which gave one a chance of dispensing patronage. True, there was rather a large manufacturing town near by, sadly in need of really intelligent and far-sighted supervision as regarded its dense and ill-housed working population and the big problems it presented, but that was really serious work and meant serious thought, which meant the envisaging of depths, and led to no social recognition. Like the brave Leonidas who held the pass at Thermopylæ she guarded the place almost single-handed against the entry of aliens with new ideas and methods. By degrees she trained a devoted band and with their aid drummed out all possibilities of progressive endeavour.

In vindication, she only did her duty according to her lights in doing this. She honestly did not believe in new ideas. She honestly thought they were dangerous and devastating. She held the place back

for years by her efforts, whilst yet working very hard, as she thought, in the right direction. She was just in some respects the average mixture of stupidity and energy which does so much harm in small as well as big fields. But she certainly worked hard. It was surprising how much she and her kind found to do. I believe they made it for themselves to do. That is, if they had gone to roots of matters and cleared up things there, and looked into things, they could have prevented many of the troubles that kept them so busy afterwards. They were like gardeners who neglect plants in their early stages, and let them get blighted and mildewed and bug-infected, and then when too late spend years in trying to undo the first mistakes with spraying and fertilising and pruning and watering. A plant's career depends on its start and the attention it receives in the beginning.

It is the same with human beings. But ladies of the manor and the funny men they enlist to help them won't see this ; they prefer to paddle along for ever and upon balance achieve nothing.

I remember, as I looked into the workings of that place, thinking that a man or woman, living in the country, if not very careful, could get tied up and caught in so many little time-wasting, ineffectual and unproductive things that they wouldn't have time or energy left over to get at the big things. They'd get up to their neck in things which were not by rights their business but the business of the State or else of the actual individual they patronised and directed. According to Madame Waddington, the Ambassador's wife, there is in France no need of these doles and house-to-house visitations, for her prouder, finer poor have by their own intelligence and family co-operation and mutual help and thrift, aided by a paternal Government, rendered this pauperisation unnecessary.

They know there is a great panacea for human ills and one that sends poverty flying from the door for ever.

Self-help.

Should there ever be any upheaval of the social system, it is to be hoped that these methods will be superseded by something much more efficacious. One good reason being that the classes below have got far too out of hand to permit themselves to profit by such ministrations. A governmental iron hand in a velvet glove will only just be strong enough.

They say across the water "a vat must stand upon its own bottom" and it's certainly true. I made up my mind that if ever again I lived in the country I'd keep my time my own, and my hands free, whatever people said, and at all costs.

The district was satisfied to be dominated by her, especially since the advent of the jewels. As I say, she had the gift of imposing her own valuation of herself and her services on those about her, always supposing they were not in touch with the outer world and had no means of gauging her by proper standards. But there were one or two little chatelaines newly come, and who had not yet lost touch or sense of things nor as yet had been narcotised by the sleep-inducing atmosphere of the place. They were perhaps of those who had not admittance to her house, or who if they penetrated there entered through the open windows and chinks as thin air, owing to the dissolving process, to which she subjected all those she felt were her inferiors.

They complained bitterly. They told me it was no use trying to do anything down there unless one had a great long sallow face surrounded by red hair. If anyone came down there who had a normal face and looked as they did in the outside world no one paid any attention to them. They had got so entirely used to the idea that all authority and all proclamations should be issued from a face of that sort. All local enterprises should be connected with a long mulish face and red hair.

After this lapse of time they could not bring them-

selves to think anyone without red hair could have authority or give any suggestions worth following.

So amongst the trees and the lanes of the quiet country-side in that little place (on the main line) there was a note of tragedy.

I hadn't been near the place for five or six years when, a few days before the third Friday in the second month of the season, I ran into the lady in the Park. She greeted me with an approach to jocularity, but I was in a tearing hurry and hadn't time to pause and throw my eye over her and see how things were with her and to what stage of mental and social development she had got. But I got her address from her and prevailed on Celia to send her a card for Friday.

"My dear, she's perfectly priceless," I said, with enthusiasm. "I can't think how I never got you to ask her before. What on earth I was thinking of I don't know."

We were more than ever keen and passionate collectors of types and interesting people or people with strongly asserted characteristics or bents. If any of us found anything marked and new we hurried up and brought it to Grosvenor Square, had a good look at it, and went into it carefully. I had got to this pitch that we were keeping ledgers of tabulated notes and information and theorisings that we had obtained about people's characters and how their idiosyncrasies worked out against each other, neutralising or accentuating each other in themselves and again in contact with different people. He got this idea from having heard that certain countries, where they have State-supported hospitals, keep extraordinarily accurate records of every case of sickness and injury that enters and leaves their doors, with all symptoms written up afterwards, keeping these in some accessible form for the use of its medical profession to refer to. These are the sort of things a state should do,

said Celia, or else why pay taxes ? Now though it was very important that records regarding physical data should be kept, it was also equally important that the inward workings of the human mind should be observed and recorded. The development and manifestations of the emotions, for instance. Ways of thinking and trains of thought and psychological sequences which in turn lead up to trains of thought which again lead up to lines of conduct, catastrophic or advantageous to the fabric of society. Research was being carried on by bands of devoted medicine men, but they were working under disadvantages through lack of means and lack of subjects. They only had the opportunity to study small circles or inhabitants of asylums, people who were not worth studying or whose callings or conditions did not bring them out into the big arena of life. She considered that placed as she was right in the very thick of things she was better fitted to do the work. She was the centre of a palpitating society clustering and swarming round the very core of things ; the hub of an ever-widening circle always leading to more combinations showing and revealing the operations and movements of the human mind (or soul) when brought into touch with engrossing complications. Emotional complications (very valuable data), international complications, religious complications, political - cum-religious - cum - social complications. Religious - cum-social - cum - political complications. Emotional - cum-social - cum - political - cum - emotional - cum - personal complications. Personal - cum - social - cum - political-cum - religious - cum - international - cum - educational complications. Phew !

Sex antagonism (which I've heard of but never come across) and the personal equation were the things that bothered Celia, and which she found difficult to fathom.

Could the world ever be governed, said Celia, unless something were known of MAN ?

No.

Was any properly organised attempt being made to study Man and his needs and to learn something of him and them ?

No.

All these vitally necessary things had to be started by private enterprise. Then if they were successful, and any good results were obtained which were talked about, the State looked into the matter, saw that here was something it ought to have done long ago, had the face to feel ashamed of itself—voted supplies, and took the thing over. And so the golden deeds go on, thanks to Celia's sort. She had engaged two secretaries (one rather a nice girl and quite good-looking—we often sorted the papers together) and collected types and information furiously about our fellow-creatures, their antecedents, admixture of blood, surroundings, education, what illnesses they had had and accidents. At considerable expense and an enormous expenditure of time we got a mass of statistics together. We divided our subjects up and said their words and actions were the result of heredity and environment or occupation or health, and whenever we could have a good look at their friends we noted them ; and having got all the knowledge we could together, we mixed them up, half of this and half of that, and prognosticated results. We crossed them and recrossed them like poultry and prognosticated results again.

We had the whole of a person's soul and mentality, or whatever you like to call it, laid out like a specimen in a museum. We had piles of ledgers, and taking it that one specimen might stand for several, if due allowances were made for variations, we thought we might fairly consider that we had several thousands. Celia had made her will, leaving them to the nation, as her idea was that the savants would add her investigations to what they had already found out, and great results be obtained.

We made careful investigations of the Irish and found many noteworthy things.

So that on that third Friday I was very pleased at the idea of meeting the lady again and determined to draw her into a corner and have a good long talk with her. I would draw her out for Celia too. And I certainly would persuade her to come to Grosvenor Square several times before she returned homewards.

I saw at once when we had been in conversation for a few minutes that she had "come on," as people put it, since I had seen her. I had feared that with advancing time, as she felt herself getting nearer to those mysterious uncountable years that lie before us, with the birthdays totalling up in perpetuity, after our earthly ones have been numbered, she would soften and change favourably and give a thought to those depths which she had hitherto ignored successfully. But I saw nothing of that sort. The change was entirely towards smartness.

She was very smart certainly to her own way of thinking. Her things were not becoming but they were carefully and tautly put on and nothing was out of place on her "made figure." They were stiff and crackling with silk and newness and sounded very smart. They were still crackling in the neighbourhood she came from. Elsewhere the fashions had moved on and the correctly dressed woman swished, just as a short time later the swish was to disappear and women were to move noiselessly in their clothes. But the lady still crackled self-consciously, and crackling did not know she dated herself behind the times. Her clothes made up for this short-coming by professing to be far finer than they were, just as everything else of hers did. They pretended to come from Paris. Celia said they came from Bayswater.

Her long mulish face was surmounted by a very fine thing in hats, perilously perched till it rose above the hats of the other people in the room. There were clusters of little peeping roses on it that looked affrighted and seemed wondering how they had ever

had the temerity to climb up on her head. They seemed to agitate in trepidation.

She began exactly where we had left off just before I left her neighbourhood. I think we had been discussing an article on the best way of landing a large lively salmon. I may be exaggerating, but it seemed to me that we took up the conversation just as if we had dropped it only a short time before.

There were all my old friends again. I didn't have to wait long for them to appear. Woodcock, wild-duck, salmon, gillies, guns, Deeside, Speyside, in spate, chestnut thoroughbred, and tit-bits of scandal from the smart world. I was to gather that she and the worthy man had plunged deep into the joys of huntin' ; and I remembered that once when I had poked my nose into the stabling for four (one loose-box only) I had foreseen this but saw that the path was strewn with difficulties for them. For in the stabling for four I counted five splints, one roarer, four swollen hocks and one case of ringbone and thought it didn't look hopeful. But they must have got over that difficulty, for she talked very brightly of it all. The daughter too it seemed had waxed into a perfectly formed seraph, and married a perfectly formed cherub and together they lived in affluence on the mother's imaginary millions, which they shared and all together continually did cry : " Tally ho ! Tally ho ! Mark over ! Hi, lost ! Hi, lost ! Seek dead ! Seek dead ! "

She was determined that it should be seen by all and sundry that she was a sportswoman of the deepest dye. She clasped a parasol to her made figure with a pheasant's head carved upon it, until at tea-time I relieved her of it and placed it out of harm's way.

" Please be careful of that, Mr Blenerhassett. I couldn't get on *at all* without that ! " she called coyly at me.

Though if she had lost it she still had other sporting reproductions and reminders on her. There was a small diamond fox tearing across her chest among the

laces and the crackling silks as if it were the best bit of grass-land going. I saw a diamond and ruby-eyed woodcock or game bird of sorts dangling from the bangle at her wrist. She hadn't a salmon anywhere on her person, but I think I saw a salmon-fly decorating the end of a hat-pin among the roses. She was determined that her sporting proclivities should not pass unnoticed. I totted the evidences of them up and felt sure that if I could have run down to her house I would have found it crammed full of every sporting trophy known to exist, besides all those little agreeable devices by which people who are not really sporting fob themselves off into thinking they are. I'd go bail if I got there I'd find it full of them. Foxes embroidered on the cushions, foxes on the blotters, hounds in full cry on the doyleys, photo-frames with gun and rod embossed on them, salmon and game on the menu-holders, sporting calendars and sporting prints galore. "Sir Bevy's winner of the Derby Stakes at Epsom, 1879. Value £7050. The property of Mr Acton. Got by Favonius out of Lady Langden. Bred by Lord Norreys. Ridden by Fordham"; or "Coomassie, winner of the Waterloo Cup, 1877. Value £1600, by Celebrated out of Queen. The property of R. F. Wilkinson. Performances—at Beckhampton, divided the Oaks with Mr Oatley's Filey. At Newmarket Champion Meeting divided with Paul Jones and won the 10 guineas stakes at Newmarket, beating twenty-two others."

Ne'er a Madonna left, even in a dark corner now!

I was delighted with her. She was perfect, and perfection always delights me. I couldn't get one real word out of her. I rang her over and over again to see if there were a flaw in her casing, but not one.

We got among the urns and buns and I asked her how certain people of those parts did that I used to meet at her house. But I found that they were "impossible" people and not to be mentioned and assumed that they had now melted into and enriched the air in the old spot. I was immensely amused to find that her house

had unaccountably, surprisingly shrunk to its true proportions in her estimation, for I received a gracious invitation to come and put up at her huntin' box for a few days next season and she'd mount me.

So. How amusing. I wondered what the pish-tush-satinwood furniture had to say to this. Rather disconcerting to be transferred in this off-hand way from the echoing chambers of a vast palace to the small rooms of a modest sporting property, without even the excitement of a jaunt in a furniture remover's van to soften the shock! I very nearly asked her to kick the self-sufficient footstools round the room for me and to give the pish-tush-satinwood chairs my salaams, but I guessed she'd think I was crazy and refrained.

Some time I'd have to make an excuse and go and interview them and see how they felt. From her conversation I gathered that several persons of distinction had pressed their horse-hair seats. How they must have revelled in this.

Having attended to her creature comforts, I watched her while she swallowed a cup of tea, an ice and two wafers and thus raised them in the social scale.

She was a miracle. From what inward founts of self-satisfaction did she draw this stream of vainglory upon which she seemed to float? I watched her there, pivoting and turning, beside herself with pride. It sat so strangely on her. I'll concede that I've seen pride carried off well. I'll concede that there's something of grace in the high mettle and half-concealed disdain of some pretty, proud woman of high, warm birth. But this. How incongruously it sat upon her with her "made figure," her sparse reddish hair, her long mulish face.

I trotted her up to Celia and left them alone together.

I did not come to claim her till the moment of her departure.

She was festive and twitted me about something I'd have rather forgotten. She had a touch no heavier than an elephant's footfall as it brushes the earth lightly in passing.

I saw her down. Her car was at hand, drawn up by the kerb a little way down, and was summoned. It drew up fussily after a good deal of winding up. It was a poor thing, the body in want of paint and new upholstery and the engine rattling in every bolt. But as I had expected, its mistress's self-importance had found its way into its manner. The rattling and vibrating of its parts, the back-firing all helped it towards creating the impression that it wanted to make ; that it was really a larger and finer car than it was. As it spluttered and trembled with excitement it seemed to accost me :

" I am Mrs Hex's car. Don't mistake me for anyone else's. I shall be beside myself with rage if you think I could belong to any ordinary person. I only move in the best society and wait in the ranks with the very best cars. Hoity-toity, tut-tut and tut again ! "

As she swam down the broad steps to it, she glorified it. I handed her in, and as she entered, she gave the word " Home " at her chauffeur as though " home " and Buckingham Palace were synonymous terms and lay back upon the flabby cushions grandly.

The chauffeur touched his cap rigidly and opened and shut his mouth quickly. " Very good, Madame."

He let in his gears with a racket. The hauteur of his manner was on a par with that of hers. He had caught the trick too of the house, and the furniture, all in it and its occupants. He made himself appear larger, more imposing than he was. I almost rubbed my eyes. By some hocus-pocus known only to himself he made himself appear to be two men at once, himself the driver, and a footman beside him on the box.

Marvellous.

" Well," I said to Celia, " what do you think of her ? Would she be of any use ? "

I only asked the question as a matter of form. I was sure Celia would say she was every use. And I was prepared to give her all information in my possession. I saw Mrs Hex figuring as the star specimen in

our collection which was to be left to the nation at Celia's death.

"Not the slightest, Peter, but thanks all the same for bringing her. I wouldn't have missed seeing her for anything."

"Why—what do you mean by saying she's no use? You don't know what you're talking about. There's oceans of material in her. You ought to study her most carefully."

"It would be waste of time."

"It certainly would *not* be waste of time. You should study her, and for very, very strong reasons. She's the very type of woman who pushes her way in local affairs, in towns or suburbs and even into bigger things if she can get there. She's the sort who holds things up so frightfully by throwing cold water on anything new that anyone wants tried."

"Yes, Peter. I know all that. Do you give me credit for seeing nothing! But she is so fearfully and tremendously typical that, if you can see what I mean, she isn't typical."

"No, I don't see what you mean."

I was bitterly disappointed. I had procured this remarkable specimen unaided and was awfully cross at its being pronounced no use.

"Yes, you do, you old stupid, if you'll only think a moment. She has all her points so tremendously marked that it makes her unique and therefore not in the least valuable to analyse or work back or forth from. But if you are so very keen on it, I'll include your observations and information and enter it up fully, but take care to mark it 'not to be used for reference.'"

This was not a bit what I had expected. Besides it was a long time since we had netted anything good and we were getting slack. I was not to be put off. I would be wily.

"If she's no use as a study, couldn't you reform her? It would be a great thing, and a real feather in your cap."

Celia shook her head. "No."

"Why not?"

"I'd rather not undertake it."

I was surprised. This was indeed unusual in Celia, who sets to work on the most unpromising specimens in the certainty of finding some good; because she says people are like tubes of tooth paste; no matter how empty they seem, if you squeeze hard enough there will always be found to be something left.

I reiterated, "Why not? Give me some reason."

"For the simplest of all reasons. *Habeas Corpus.*"

"*Habeas Corpus?* Give it up."

"If I were to clear the weeds out of that character there'd be nothing left. See?"

I didn't at all agree with her, but I left it at that. Once a woman has made up her alleged mind there's nothing more to be said.

THE STATUE

I AM not sure but that a little tiny tale such as this I am about to tell should nestle in a mass of more or less extraneous matter like a turquoise in the matrix stone, a pip in an apple or a chestnut in its burse. Or even, to take another simile from the vegetable world, wouldn't it be better to let grow on the extraneous matter like a little bush of mistletoe sprouting out of an apple-tree? These two have no real relationship, but neither is as nice without the other.

There are so many ways of telling stories now. The good old days of once-upon-a-time are no more, and no longer does one huddle down comfortably and with anticipation to listen to what follows after that phrase has set the stage, cleared up certain doubts as to one of the unities and then drawn aside the curtain.

The teachings of the Church are that we are not to expect too much of life or anything; that we must be satisfied with little. It says: "Don't expect to be happy, but prepare to be interested." It takes away the illusion about the happiness but gives us the other thing in return, which is very good. (The foregoing is not relevant to my point but let it stand.)

The teachings of Art are that we must never be satisfied with anything, no matter how good, and to expect and try for the most enormous, inflated and impossible, out-of-reach things; never to be satisfied with moderate results or to say that enough is as good as a feast, or blessed are the poor in spirit. If an artist can only do his best he may shut up shop. For success goes to the genius, and the genius is a person who can do better than his best oftener than other people can. He is like the animal who rose superior to his nature and under

stress of circumstances climbed a tree though he was not of a tree-climbing species. The impertinence and presumption of the artist should be something undreamt of, in his work. When he has done something perfectly wonderful and far beyond his powers, he should be bitterly ashamed of himself and gnash his teeth and cry with rage because it isn't ever so much better and not nearly as good as he meant it to be. So it will always be very hard work to be an artist ; and it will always be surprising how many people are foolish enough to want to be artists. The explanation is that there is something distressingly fascinating about the pursuit of Art. When the artist is working he is often idling. When he is idling he is often working at highest pressure. He is feeling about in the dark ; he doesn't know what he is doing half the time, or if he does, he pretends he doesn't. Everything in Art is so private and wonderful and mysterious and every other word that means different shades of these things and upon which I cannot lay my hands to write down, that he daren't even mention it to himself. There are no rules, unless you call beliefs rules. There's a pretence that there are but it is not true. The tenets of Art vary as much as the tenets of a religion do, as time goes by ; fashion settles their variations. And fashion is a more serious word than you might think, for it means in a large degree what people are thinking and doing at a given period of the world's development.

Speaking then of fashion, it has borne itself into my inner consciousness that for a book to record a series of events upon which, in telling them, the author gives his opinion as to whether they are good or bad or silly or wise or unavoidable or the reverse, is for it to be a very dull and badly written book, and one to be considered, according to modern artistic standards, very poor work. In these days far more is required of a writer, and far different. He must hypnotise you, intoxicate you, and above all make world-music to you. He must at all costs appeal to the ear of the eye as

you read him line by line. They tell me we have an embryo and dormant eye shut up in the brain, so to have an ear in the eye may not be as foolish as it appears.

If you read a word you sound it mentally and it's not the sound that it makes if spoken. So our writer must set himself to compose this visible but inaudible music, and should the ideas get in the way of the music they must be lopped and cut about so that they won't ; or even thrust aside altogether or draped in obscurity of the profoundest so as not to take your straining attention off the melody of the words. In the past literature grew up to record things, to speak of them and discuss them, to preach, to point a moral. The words were the servants of the thoughts. Nowadays the thoughts are the servants of the words. The masters are servants, the servants are masters, and so the fashion, the spirit of these democratic times, is reflected *perfectly*—though not chronicled—for to chronicle a little lucidity is essential—in the writings of the period.

Nowadays the moral, if there should be one, in all likelihood has been squeezed so utterly out of shape by all the goings-on of the words that if anyone were to go off on a wrong line of conduct through having taken it to heart, he couldn't in all fairness be blamed. The angel with the big book will be sorely perplexed when the time for settling the antecedents and primary causes that led up to modern crimes has come ; I'm told this is done very carefully in heaven.

As I am going to try in an amateurish way to write this story on modern lines—wherever I can do so without interfering with the action or the ideas—I am going to get my moral out of harm's way before it is too late.

Here it is. It is waste of time to be too subtle.

I am a firm believer in gratitude, both for benefits

received or wrongs done. Revenge, as must clearly be seen, being the proper sort of gratitude to apply to the latter. And a great debt of gratitude is owing to those who have helped to tidy up a language or make its meaning clear, to establish good useful words, or to ascribe to them certain uses and meanings—by quoting sane and commendable users and giving their text—and by stalling them comfortably and with propriety in the dictionary. We already have one great international inarticulate music and when a writer by a succession of sweet soothing sounds lulls us musically over his page into a sort of hypnotic drowse, he is not quite on the right track. The province of the writer is to wake up those that slumber. The lyre in its day was made of bone, not of paper.

And here may I be heard if I say this, that there are some books that put you to sleep because words and thoughts alike are boring, and others send you to sleep because they are so wonderful that they are like the music of the waves on the shore, delicious surging sounds, coming in, going out, and soothing, soothing, soothing you as they do so.

But if I were going to write like this I should study counterpoint.

Literature I take to be an attempt at fixation of thoughts on life and Man, and on what happens in life to Man, and what effect it has on his soul, and whether he has one or not. That, I think, is its *raison d'têre.* We sleep in our beds, we wear our hats on our heads and our boots on our feet. We don't drive down Piccadilly in a four-poster or put our feet through our hats or tie our boots round our foreheads.

The word fixation, even though it may not be in the dictionary, is an excellent one. It is borrowed, I believe from chemistry, for I've heard chemists talking of the fixation of nitrogen. Nitrogen, besides being a vital thing, is said to be a most useful and necessary thing. It is everywhere around us in stupendous quantities, but as it is wild and shy it is almost

impossible to lay hands on it, or, as they call it, fix it. This can only be done by providing it with a sort of soul mate to which it instantly rushes, and having joined with it, it becomes quite tame and can be used. The soul mate varies, for different people can cajole it to combine in different ways. I'm not quite sure, but I believe I've heard this said. This phrase fixation pleased me, and it seemed that it could be applied to many things to clear them up. A good word or a good phrase is the handmaid of philosophy. I turned it over in my mind and I thought grammar is an attempt at the fixation of the language (not much use if it comes to that). Time in music is an attempt at the fixation of rhythm (no use at all unless handled very freely). Marriage is an attempt at fixation of love (which is absurd), and surely literature should be an attempt at the fixation of thoughts and conclusions on a very important point. Namely, man and his doings and theorisings, with a view to laying up a store of knowledge for future use. And if literature is to fix things, surely its language should be clear.

Music can talk nonsense as much and as often as it pleases, for laws are not drawn up in music. Nations don't discuss international affairs or draw up treaties in music. You cannot make a binding promise in music. It is not the mission or work of music to explain to us what we are, and what is to become of us. That great prerogative belongs to language and is a sacred trust.

Music may ruminate, meditate and speculate delightfully, but it can arrive at no definite conclusion. At most it may prompt a train of thought which if properly translated into words may produce a definite thought leading to a definite conclusion.

So you see the gravity of the position as regards the use of words and the method of writing them down. I would think less of the organic form of the whole myself than the clearness of the transmission of a thought.

I wouldn't think that because I began on a lovely foolish sentence and ended up on one and that all those in between were pitched on a like tone that I had done something valuable. But if pen in hand I wandered along and out of the chance sequence of ideas that flowed from it one big thought gathered itself together and stood out, I'd think I had done well for myself and for mankind. And then I wouldn't toss aside the written matter that led up to the idea, for that would be too like cutting a friend who had passed a more valuable friend on to you, going off and leaving him in the lurch.

One reason for obscurity I can admit to a certain extent. Any book that anyone writes is bound to run the risk of falling into the hands of people who dislike the writer and would pick many flaws and tee-hee, tee-hee over the contents. Inevitably, a book once published, comes within reach of inimical hands on their payment of the catalogued price. But though the book itself cannot be kept out of the reach of a profane grasp, the contents can be pitched so far above the grasp of the inimical minds, by a cleverly woven veil of wordy obscurity, that though they have bought and paid for it, they are—sold, for the contents are sealed to them ; quite beyond them. I have a mental picture of a prankish author to whom this idea occurred. . . . Knowing that the best way to deal with people of whom he does not approve and who do not approve of him is to avoid them—having built himself an intellectual eyrie, climbing up into it, and calmly drawing up the ladder and making it fast. Just pausing before he enters and shuts the door to make a derisive face at the others below, who would like to come up and bait him, but can't.

But to avoid people one dislikes is really to go to too much trouble altogether and it is better to be clear and free and appeal openly to all the delightful people there are.

However, not this time. I've begun on a mysterious

baffling note, and I'm going on as long as I can ; that is until I come to something I want to say. But till then I'll go back to what I call the Russian literary atmosphere.

No Russian or his compatriots would dream of calling a spade a spade, so their writings are rich and juicy and mournful. They'd not find any place or niche for one unless it were a gravedigger's spade—an ordinary agricultural spade is much too cheerful and normal a thing to get into a Russian book. For choice it should be a spade which has dug the grave of a suicide ; the grave of one who was so happy that nothing but death could put the final touch to it and make it perfectly complete. A perusal of these books convinced me that a Russian character—in a book—takes no steps to end his life if he is miserable, for he could not then get the full flavour of his misery, or savour it slowly throughout the long slow-going Russian years, admiring its perfection, and loath to do anything to take from it.

He has bosom friends with shaggy beards, doctors, or else prosperous but morbid commercial men. The morbidity seems of every assistance there in commercial circles and appears to constitute a sort of freemasonry so that morbid people buy and sell to each other and traffic together in dark offices in narrow morbid streets in Moscow (or elsewhere) whose names end in off or—sky. They are waited upon lovingly by old family servants whose ancestors have winced under the knout. The Russian who has not committed suicide because it would be waste of so much good misery unburdens himself to all these morbid bear-like people, well nourished and yet introspective. They and the old family servants commune lavishly and there is an undernote of salt tears and samovars.

To describe what I want to describe after their manner I would write of what isn't rather than of what

is. If one knows of all the isn'ts one begins to perceive what is. If you are told who is in a room or a place you very often know who isn't. If you know what you don't want it helps you a lot to decide what you do want. If it isn't an isn't, it's an is, is quite simple to apprehend, I think. If you see a bottle without a cork you quickly think of a cork even if it's not there. For even should the contents loom largely in your mind preparatory to looming largely in your glass you are wondering if they have been spoilt by the cork's absence, so the isn't in this case comes before the is. Thus, hold a stocking up before a Russian poet or philosopher or painter and the thing that will absorb their notice is the hole which they see in the heel. That is not what is, but what isn't. The poet instead of rhapsodising about the foot over which the stocking was once drawn, apostrophises the hole.

The philosopher will propound the old question, What becomes of the material that once was in the place of the hole ?—and give out a dissertation on the indestructibility of matter.

The painter will paint the hole and immortalise it as Bairnsfather has immortalised the "better 'ole." It may be a semicircular hole or a jagged hole or a squarish hole, or an indeterminate hole neither to be classed as a square 'ole or a round 'ole. But there ! It is a space, and the artist seizes hungrily upon it. True to Art School tradition, which long since discovered the value of the isn't compared to the cheapness and hackneyedness of the is, and by which it was discovered that the weakest and most niggling of draughtsmen could get an imitation of vigour and dash into their work by drawing not a given object but the space about it, he directs his attention to the hole that the object he desires to draw makes in the Empyrean or against the background of a dirty paint-splashed studio. It's a dodge and a good dodge for the artist who does not see form. The seeing of form, or, as the artists put

it, the feeling for form, is a priceless gift, and some carry it perfectly and need not resort to this crutch to correct their appreciation of the viewed line curving about to the formation of a given thing. While others don't. Those who can do without it should never ask its artificial aid for their grasp of form, as it ends by debauching it. It encourages to see the things that are not, instead of the things that are. It is inviting the mind to dwell on what isn't instead of what is. Reynolds would, I doubt, have done it in painting, or Oliver Goldsmith in writing.

But here we are. When someone does something wrong, acting on the Art School tip, I fix my eyes on space, and say not, Show me the criminal, but, Show me the instigator of what he has done. The instigators are the possessors of jaded over-educated palates (is there anything more awful than over-education?) who ask for and must be given some brut draught dug out of some ultra-sophisticated cellar. The clear rill that gushes out of a mountain-side would not slake their thirst.

But for all that the idea of the space fits in capitally with my story. I can deliver the goods by following up this arabesque of nonsense.

This space on which the slender thread of my story hangs was a long, long, circuitous, straight, sometimes perpendicularly larger, and at other times perpendicularly smaller space and at other times horizontally smaller or larger. By fastening your mind on this space you may get an idea of something convex. It will be just right if you will fix the idea of something convex in your mind and then, having got this, proceed to build up around the convexity. That will be working the Art School tip inversely. There you are first shown the object and then asked to observe the space. I give you the space first and then tell you to carry on, and so, naturally, if you build up around a long narrow space you will get something concave.

If I had been telling this story in the good old way, I'd have begun by saying at once that what I was

talking about was concave, but that is out of date, so I approached it inversely, and in the Russian way.

My little story is about—— But just wait a bit.

It was supremely difficult to get Dan to say yes. If I'd told him point-blank he would have said no. If I'd said he oughtn't to, he'd have gone like a shot. That's partly how I managed him finally. I believe that I am a good diplomatist, or have been becoming one lately. Trying to lead a judge with gout in both feet, if not in the brain, to do things and see things the way one wants is all the training any diplomatist should need. I'd had a few more briefs at the end of this term and felt my power growing within me. I take an extraordinary delight in making people do what I wish and they don't. It causes me unbounded satisfaction. I proposed to go for a walk. The lawn was soggy-damp, for there had been a downpour of long-delayed rain, which had been prayed for all over the country. It caught the curate when he came to call. And we had jocularly reminded him that it was his own doing as we helped him into both macintosh and galoshes when he was leaving.

The billiard-table, as it was a hired house, was no use. Playing on it was like Alice's dream of playing croquet with a flamingo, which turned round and looked at her when she was about to take her shot. We had bathed twice already that morning, and read all the papers and books in the place. Celia was writing letters with Ada Lamb's assistance and had begged us to make ourselves scarce.

I said: "Let's go for a walk." Dan said: "Don't let's go for a walk." "Why not?" I said. It was the only thing to do and I particularly wished he would.

"It's so far."

"You don't know how far it is, and it can't be more than three miles," inadvertently I replied.

"You're not after taking me to *see* something?" Dan's voice was suspicious and he used a colloquialism.

He hates seeing things and always fears that I may take him to look at a Norman church or Druidical remains or something that shows traces of a Roman occupation.

"No," I said nonchalantly. "No. Only a walk to stretch our limbs. Mine are getting all crumpled up from getting no exercise and a walk does give one an appetite, doesn't it? And just now Mrs Moggs is really in good form. Those lobsters *à la* Newburgh were good, weren't they?"

"Yes, they were," he agreed, and after a short silence also said he'd come for a walk. Later.

Anyone who has been unfortunate enough to lead an idle life at any time for long enough to get bored with it must have noticed how impossible it is to find time to do anything during the day. There is hardly time to get up and shave and dress and breakfast, lunch, tea, and dine and wash hands and smoke and read papers and change into flannels and out again. Something seems to go wrong with the clock and the hands constantly point to a time when it is too soon before another time to try and fit anything in. They register all sorts of uninspiring hours. Eleven forty-five. Well, who ever started to do anything at eleven forty-five? One has just finished smoking. It's too late to think, too soon to read, too late to go out, too soon to stay in. Or else ten minutes to one, and that is not any sort of time at all. It means nothing. It leaves an odd wedge-shaped piece of time that can't be put to any practical use. You couldn't start a life-work at ten minutes to one. Six o'clock in the morning is the correct time for that. Half-past two is much too early and twenty past three is a limp, nerveless time o' day, no use to man or beast!

After that you're getting towards tea-time, and what man in his senses would let anything interfere with tea?

One can't settle to anything if one has the whole day in which to do it. Between cigarettes, bridge and

billiards and paper-reading or tennis, or wondering what one will do next, the day flies, and if by any chance a spare quarter of an hour does come along it's no use. It only gives you fifteen minutes to remember yourself and that you are bored or that you have a touch of rheumatism in that knee you hurt climbing. Idleness reminds one that one is there in short, and that is always annoying.

I believe I must be afflicted with imagination, but every hour of the day as it crops up bears a different aspect to me. Half-past two is a sober, respectable hour, draped in black, I can't think why. Three o'clock is a bright little bit of the day. It may or may not. Maybe yes, maybe no. Four o'clock is either too early or too late, according to whom one is with or what one is doing. Ten o'clock in the morning is a neutral woolly sort of time. It has never associated itself in my mind with anything. I've never done anything special at that time. I've never heard of anything special about then. It has, as far as I'm concerned, no history. That is an awful thing to be able to say about anything or anybody. Twelve o'clock midday is a full-bodied, burgomaster-like cheerful hour. There is yet hope. One may achieve something with one's day, and by this means, with one's life even, at twelve midday.

Seven o'clock in the evening is too late and too early both at the same time. One is not yet hungry and one is very frightened that one is not going to be. One sits down and remembers might-have-beens and, worse still, might-not-have-beens.

I haven't any vivid images of the other hours. I had, I remember, a great fancy for the smaller hours as a young man. They were, looking back upon them, slightly tinted pink.

Dan feels this way about the different hours and I had to pretend it was half-past four to get him out. He rather fancies this time of the afternoon. An old rich uncle had visited him when he was a small boy at

school and given him a five-pound note round about that hour, I heard him say—and it has pleasant associations for him.

His watch was out of order through his having worn it while bathing, so he had to take my word for it.

The road there is delightful. It is winding and attractive, with glimpses and vistas that suggest possibilities. Certain roads have this about them. They appeal to you and you turn the corners with eagerness, perfectly certain and half sure that you will see something you like around them. We all know these roads, so I won't talk too much about their charm. You come across them here and there when you stay in fresh places, and you know a friendly road the moment you see it. Your feet have trodden it often. Its long low hedges and wayside odours are familiar, strangely familiar. So are the side glimpses it gives you anon and again into copse and plantation, where the fat family mansions half hide so cosily, in which jolly people live and see to their home farms and do all sorts of jolly things. The road knows you and you know it. It seems pleased to see you and even appears to have been waiting specially for you and appears a hint sad, just a bit, that you hadn't seen fit to come along sooner.

It would be a delightful thing to be a collector of roads, and though so bulky, I wish I could get a few of the nicest together and keep them all handy and go a-walking on them—under their shady trees, that drop soft pungent leaves or, in spring, petals or lime-tassels, or else little green bobbins according to their kind, and spread a carpet varying with the seasons for my feet—when I wished to or was in the mood, without having to go a long tiresome railway journey to get to where they are. This road was lovely and brought its dense and glorious woods right up to the dim sea's edge, to the margin of a wide sheltered bay. The air blew in so mildly that it hardly carried half last year's

leaves down, and the little new-comers in spring had to push the remainder off so as to make a way for themselves.

A few steps brought us out to the dull gold sands to walk on whose velvet softness sent a thrill up one's spine; they were so pat-smooth and elastically firm and rounded to one's feet. They were gold and glossy, embossed and piled well to the land, for we were there in a sort of cove, curved sharp to the left under the protecting lea of very high, lumpish red cliffs and rocks. We paused as we left the shadow of the woods and looked at these. Each time one visited the cove's cool dark embrasure they greeted one differently. Sometimes they were children's great enormous red fee-fo-fum giants, sitting there looking at the ships as they went by, and the matted grass slipping down their edges and bossy formations was their hair, and longer grasses waving in tufts in the wind, their whiskers. Oftener they were towering monsters of fantastic shapes, Assyrian bulls and rams, or mysterious and forbidding colossi ranged alongside of great temple pillars that looked Babylonian, with uncouth carvings and sculptures winding up them.

It would not have seemed impossible or out of the general run of things to have seen the Emperor Assurbanipal issuing from them with a clang of brazen doors, accompanied by the retinues of his High Priests. Cruel-looking, dark people, hardly to be thought of as men, with enclosed beards and priestly caste marks on their faces, walking behind him as they bore aloft the peculiar furbished insignia of their mysterious offices.

To-day they did not seem like children's ogres or buildings, but jutted out in big soft formations into the bay, like massive groups of great couchant half-attentive beasts with their fore-paws in the water.

I asked Dan if he saw anything suggestive of these things about them and he said certainly not. They

were rocks, big ones, and that ended the matter. Red sandstone, too, not any use for anything but scenery.

It was very little use asking Dan to admire scenery or to look at it ; he only sees things that are in it, and will point them out to you ; such as a mountain edge where they quarry out a certain sort of stone or slate ; cliffs where you could get the eggs of some birds and not of others ; or call your attention to a steamer or ship, a wind-jammer or brigantine, state its tonnage and where bound for, and where from, and under what flag she steams or sails, and what cargo she carries.

The view here extends in a great gracious curve for miles and he could see everything in it and what it was for though not its beauty. His sight is magnificent and would have been an asset to an artist. He saw the coastguard's cottage, perfect and tiny on a very distant point, and when he showed me I saw it too. It was an attractive landscape, very delightful. The soft hills, not high enough to be stern, came gradually down, Nature's amphitheatre sloping to a sea-stage. They were pastorally green, cut haphazard with hedge and tillage to different shapes and tones. Little buildings nestled like white and coloured toys among them. Indeed, from where we stood it was toyland itself. There was a puff of cloud behind a toy steeple ; both white, but the cloud whitest. A toy railway track went curving in and out, in and out, and disappeared into a toy tunnel, by the side of which, on the embankment, stood a little tall toy signal-post. A wreath of toy smoke came up suddenly, and we heard a little toy scream, as a toy train disappeared in the little hole.

"That's the five-thirty-nine for town," said Dan equably, but I didn't believe him, for toy trains like that don't really get anywhere. It would go round and round in a circle in and out of the Christmas bazaar tunnels till the clockwork ran down.

The waves curled slowly, cornucopia-wise, slanting

to the bay's wide indentation and saying hush, hush, hush, all along the shores, as we walked by them, giving off a little breeze of fresh salty air, like a cool whisper up into our faces, as they broke and softly spread almost under our feet. We had to jump several times to evade them and this brought about something that nearly sent Dan home in a rage. It is a beach densely strewn with shells, especially great big cockle shells, like miniature white wash-basins. They lie there after every tide, each full of clear sea-water and a few grains of sand at the bottom, as if little housemaids had not emptied them, and to walk inadvertently is to get a spout of cold water up your ankles. You tread on them, they crackle, tip up, and up goes the water. Dan never thinks of looking where he is going and so got wringing wet. I did not want him to go back. Anything but that. Not so many more yards and we would be round the bend and the incoming tide (the little waves out beyond were running up eagerly to the headlands) would soon have made retreat impossible. I began, striking deep quickly, to speak to him of himself. Any conversational opening will serve to lead to this topic soon with him, he is so given to speculating about himself. He is interested in himself, and wonders why he said this or what induced him to do that. He is his own audience, never restive; watches himself and then holds debates on himself; how he appears to others; what he is really like, and what his type is, and if he is really consistently true to type. To hear him is like fluttering the pages of a University Extension lecture hand-book, with foot-notes, on Hamlet the Melancholy Dane, edited by himself. Was he or was he not all there? What was his motive for this action? Why did he speak so to Polonius and say "very like a whale!" and why didn't he propose to Ophelia?

That reminds me—— But later.

I started him and didn't listen, but said Ah! and Yes! with seventeen different inflections, using them

in rotation. What useful things inflections are. I keep a lot at hand. Using a few skilfully, there was no need to listen to him, and instead my thoughts wandered to the sea. I love the sea. It amuses me because it is so human. No sooner has it finished one useless thing than it turns round and begins to do another. A few hours back it was bent on going out as far as it's possible for a neap tide to go, and now here it was equally bent on coming in as far as a neap tide could, and cut us off, and I chuckled, for this suited me well. It was just doing what I wanted.

"What do you say ? " said Dan suddenly.

"I say yes, deliberately yes," using my most decided inflection.

This satisfied him quite well, for he went on again.

"That's just what I feel about it ! " etc., etc.

I thought of the sea again. How is it that it never gets tired of doing the same thing over and over again ? It sets about its business, as I said before, with surprising gusto, never bored by repetition, as a woman is by housework or society, or a man by office work or routine. And how methodical. It puts all the big shells and pebbles of a certain weight, right high and forward, scattered in a long line, and nearer to itself places another long wavy line of smaller shells and little pebbles, and nearer again all the little 'uns and tinies and bits and powdery-sized pebbles.

"I mustn't let him go on too long about himself," I thought, "for I may want to turn this tap on again to keep him occupied while we——"

"Is that a dog I see before me ? " I said jocosely.

A large, animated piece of brightish, pinkish agitated fluff that might or might not have been an Irish terrier stood before us wagging tail and lolling tongue. White dogs here look like heraldic griffins or things you buy at bazaars against your will, for the earth is red, and the sand is red, and it's against dog nature not to have a good roll in both occasionally, so

they run about joyfully and add to the gaiety of nations by turning Rose du Barri pink, and the first one you see makes you rub your eyes and wonder what ails you. They are not, I think, rich people's dogs. They seem too happy and free and healthy to be that. Whom they belong to I don't know, but there are always dogs, pink and otherwise, on the beaches about here, perpetually waiting for someone to sling a stone to be fetched by a good dog. This one romped heraldically and sported and hoped we would throw something.

"It strikes me——" I said.

"Things are always striking you," said Dan, "and when they do you stand stock-still. We'll never get this fearsome walk over if you don't come on. And this habit of yours of standing and stopping to talk to dogs you haven't been introduced to and to hold long conversations with them on politics as you so often do, or Celtic poetry or monogamy or Buddhism, is a great mistake. You will be arrested as a lunatic for talking to dumb animals about things they can't understand and shouldn't."

Dan was annoyed at being interrupted when on his favourite theme.

"Nothing is beyond a dog's comprehension. You've only to look in their eyes to see that."

"You'll be arrested as loony, I tell you."

I'd got him as far as the railway arch. Once through that and having taken the first to the left I'd breathe—or argue—again.

"Do you really believe that one is capable of forming one's own character, Dan, or is one obliged to go about with the leavings of one's ancestors? Take yourself for instance——"

He is great upon this. It's his subject. I led the way over a rather complicated and slippery stile, hurrying along ahead of him and up the hill by the railway line, visible in a cutting between the usual wooden and wire posts.

He had to hurry to catch up with me to give me his

answer. His character was a thing of beauty and intricacy according to his report of it. He never let it out of his sight. It was a Christmas tree loaded with good things, which were never stripped off as in the case of a tree, but remained to accumulate year after year, fresh beauties and gifts being added to it all the time. Spartan fortitude was the thing of the moment, and should be useful when——

He is proud of his ancestors because they chose to do the right thing in choosing to be his ancestors. But he is not going to let their heads be turned in their graves by giving them the credit for his talents and mental adornments. These are entirely the result of his own efforts. All the way up after the lines had disappeared into the tunnel he drew the subject out. It was like a wet cloth. Pull it out very long in one direction and it got narrow one way. Having narrowed it, you began on the narrowness and drew it out wide till the bit that was narrow was wide and the other way about. I could use clearer words to describe this, but hackneyed phrases cause me a nostalgia and whoever reads this can perhaps see what I mean.

I didn't listen. I used my inflections and I thought of the scenery again. Nature is so wonderful; her charm lies in this, that you can admire her constantly and it never turns her head, for it's not a human head. I'd taken daily walks along that coast and nothing appeared the same twice, nor did it stay the same for long enough to tire you, as people's faces do. I was feeling a bit tired of Dan's, but then soon I wouldn't be able to see it.

He continued continuously.

I inflected.

I'd stepped it out along the little red path, part clay, part sand, part embedded pebbles and flints that gritted under one's heels as one climbed and climbed, more than once. Time and again I'd looked out to the sea over that tangled little wind-toughened

quick-set hedge, straggling along over and under and this side and that of the little, now straight, now slanting weathered oak paling clinging to the edge of the cliff. Replaced newly where it had rotted or blown down, off the crumbling earth, if the cliff had given on its brink. The swirly rooted ivy was in clumps against and through it, effectively glossy and of the sort that had flat, bluish-dark clusters of dryish berries on it. Bramble growths went twining and binding it together. The agitated twigs of the quick-set failed here and there though in others one peered through their criss-cross prickles where they rose up, having been turned an ashen-grey by the salty air. This side of the oak slats, and hardly visible against the growths, was a little straight, thin, close-spiked old-fashioned railing. Here and there a circular bite seemed gone from the side of the cliff and you could look down through apple-green leaves to the lovely bottle-green sea-water, awash and clear over the big flat boulders.

To the right the ground was cultivated to the edge of the mountain path and scores of fat close-crinkled cabbages, creaking juicily, were growing in lines. And fat dew or raindrops or moisture of some sort balanced skilfully in the cool crinkles. Behind, waiting to be planted, was the fresh-ploughed land, looking like a lot of brown immovable waves. And oh! the beauty of the sea as I saw it looking back over the tops of those little thin close-spiked railings. Each day I came there I saw something different. On Monday it was windy and cloudy and gave rather mixed effects. I came twice that day. In the morning the light had a fancy for all the softly rounded bits and lay appreciatively on sloping meads of mist-green. One only saw the round bits of the hills. It took no notice of the flat bits or prominences. In the afternoon it had a fancy to pick out all jagged spurs, whether of rock or harsh lands. Back of us it left everything in an almost complete darkness, on the other promontory,

but selected out of myriads of houses invisible there four of a terrace and made them look a ghastly radiant white ; there were only the four of them staring across at us out of the mist as if they were faces blanched with terror. Tuesday a stiffish breeze blew and the sea-birds called pessimistically. The trees and hedges and grasses seemed to shrink with the cold. The headlands jutted out sternly and looked unpropitious. All the crannies of the cliffs were stuffed with cold, dark, blackish-red shadows. They were pitted deeply with them. Wednesday was a grey day. It had rained and would rain again and the light had taken on a greyish-white brilliance. Everything was swathed. Hills and horizons alike, to right and left before us were muffled in ghost-grey shroudings. While I was looking, wraith clouds opened above and let grey glories come slanting down, pouring and spilling them in a silver treasure, till they glittered like Lohengrin's shining armour, alone and oval, in the soft grey wide waste of the sea. Thursday the lands projected reposedly as if in the hour of a well-earned rest, green and brown, into a softly moving, calmly incoming sea. Far from me, a host of misty fishing ships with cobweb sails sheltered in a misty harbour in the hollow of a quiet hill.

Friday it was all different. It looked crisp and clear and brisk, and as nice as if it had all been washed and done up and spring-cleaned ; bright fresh greens, bright fresh browns. The light visited everything impartially and left nothing unseen. Everything was as speckless as in a room where the housemaids have all been at work thoroughly with mops and brooms and soft soap, and have retired, leaving things trim and clean and all but dry.

Here was Saturday and the promise of yesterday's brightness was fulfilled. I heard the high swettering song of the lark as he rose gaily. His manners are good and he sings his thanks to his Creator for letting

him live through the long summer days. I asked myself if heaven could be as heavenly as earth. We had climbed up and up and up but had taken no turnings. The steepness of the incline had cut Dan's breath short but not his conversation, and he still told me about himself in gasps, and I still inflected in gasps. We paused, for we were all but there, though Dan didn't know it. The railway line (no connection whatever with the toy railway line, as I preferred to think) now soared above our heads on an embankment and a few quick appreciative steps under a small dark arch led us out to what must surely have been the edge of the world !

We stood out to sea between the two curves of the widening bays on the point of connection between linked headlands jutting out on either side, only half gloriously visible. The little meadow we stood in overhung roundly, cliff-high and gently pent-wise, now up, now down, a curvature of greening grassy carpet pile, springing close under our feet.

From under the little dark railway arch we had stepped instantly into a delicious blue wan airy nothingness, so serene, so mild, we could for a space only marvel and stand agaze. The little fisher ships, out of the harbour now, hung delicately in a curtain of faint air. There seemed no sea, no horizon, nothing but air, exquisite, misty, warm, pale air.

Looking down in surprise and delight to where the cove murmured below us, we saw slipping quiet past us the gleam of dim blue dimpling waters. The sea was there after all, and the lower part of the infinitely pale motionless curtain, seemingly of a lovely flimsy fineness, was not air, but the sea's softly moving dream-depths. They were mirror-smooth for the most, but just faintly tarnished here and there by a little breath of a breeze, puffing vicariously off the land. It came and played on the back of our necks carelessly and then passed on to the sea, ribboning it in long blue-tinged ells, narrow and horizontal.

A lot of little green, close, pampered hills behind us shut off the rest of the country. It was a sequestered place.

And now that we were there, I thought: "It is a pity——"

We gazed around. There were moles about, any amount of them, for they had thrown up little piles of red loose earth. Personally I could have stayed there for hours on end, staring at those soft sea wonders in front of us, but I steeled myself and, as if there were nothing to see, I started to slide down a little path which, though at my very feet, dissembled its existence in the tufts of growth at the cliff's edge.

"If you don't think you can manage it, don't come. It's rough on clothes"—mine were getting caked and rubbed most deplorably.

"Can't manage it! I like that, you sedentary old quill-driver. Do you mean to say that you think that there is something you can do that I can't." He was down after me in a trice. I said nothing. He was coming and that was all that mattered. I had tried it once or twice again lately, much to the chagrin of the man who brushed my clothes, and I believe he was wondering "what game" I had been up to to get them so clotted and crashed. But they were old clothes and it had to be done, and I was getting down most nimbly. I didn't gasp nearly as much as Dan when we stood at the bottom at last. It didn't occur to him to ask me why I had brought him down that impossible path and let him get his clothes into such a disarray. It was enough for Dan that it was difficult to get down and would be difficult to get up. That is all Dan expected of anything, that it should be difficult. Difficult! He battened on difficulties; he tried for them, and tried them and compared them against others. He lived for difficulties and he hunted for them, and required them, so to speak, to be served with every meal; not little annoying difficulties—these only made him peevish—but big ones, where he risked

neck and limb or the tearing of a muscle off a bone with a swish. He was enchanted with this path. I felt now I ought to have told him of it in the first instance and then I need not have gone to so many subterfuges to get him there. But he wasn't going to be allowed to stay by the foot of the path and try to climb it. I saw he was just preparing to, so I squilched off quickly through the sand which wasn't sand, but millions of infinitesimal gritted-up bits of shells too tiny to tell of; the waves whirl them up here and grind them on a handful of slippery rocks below. They act apparently like the pebbles in the gizzard of a bird. Everything washed into this cove, no matter how hard, is broken up, assimilated and digested by the sea, almost in the form of powder.

I squilched and crackled off noisily and of course he came after me. He wasn't going to climb the path unnecessarily unless I stood and looked at him do it, to see how much better his performance was than mine. He must have an audience (I should say a looker-on) as well as a difficulty, you know. But again I hurried on, talking with my tongue and crackling with my feet, so that I couldn't hear him when he asked me where I was going or what for. To answer him might, just as I was on the very pip of bringing the coup off, send him straight home again. On I went, falling over one last hexagonal, polygonal, pentagonal, heptagon of a rock, of which all the onals and agonals caught me in tenderest places, and presently stood before the long winding, curving, convex thing I introduced you to earlier, and around which through a building-up process you got an idea of the concavity. Though also you may not.

This is rather too Russian. I shall never get on if I refer to it in these terms. It was the space I mentioned to you earlier and it went forward ever so far. Looking at it in the way which is really the only way it can be of any use to my story, it was concave.

Naturally it had to be this, for it was a cave.

It was a cave and a very special cave indeed, winding far back into the hills, miles long, and dark. Æons and æons ago a mighty river changed its course for some reason or maybe for no reason at all. In the good old prehistoric times Nature was more capricious, more woman-like, younger and given to change. A river often changed its course ; grew tired of the hills about her, wanted to see life, and decided to go and stay somewhere else. The one that once flowed here did so, and it may have been her undoing, for there is no trace of her now, only the underground channels that with unbelievable patience she made for herself, creeping in and out of natural fissures, joining them up, increasing and opening them and finding her way ; flowing now wide, now small, curving round obstacles, pillars of sandstone and quartz crystals mixed together.

This cave presented not merely one difficulty but a whole menagerie of them, and as I say this I recollect that inside its widish mouth, to which one ascended a little as it sloped gradually down to one, a lot of odd-shaped, reddy and variegated-coloured squarish and roundish intelligent-looking boulders grouped themselves like animals, looking out at us. Red tigers, and sheep, and red bison and buffalo, and red lions too, though, thank goodness, not the sort that one finds as one motors through country villages.

Perhaps it will appear that I have been contradicting myself in asserting that it would not be easy to lure Dan into the cave, having just stated that it bristled with difficulties and how very anxious he always was to grapple with them. The apparent contradiction lies in that, as I explained, Dan can't bear to be taken to "see" anything. And very naturally a great interesting cave stretching and winding for miles inland would be the sort of thing that people would go to "see," and this put it entirely out of Dan's list of things to be done.

Going to see interesting things is "not done," or very rarely, by a fellow of Dan's social standing who hunts with three packs. Or only if he must, and there is no way out of it.

I got up the slope, still gritting and slipping and talking quickly about nothing at all; inflecting and saying off-handedly that I must have a look inside as it was many a long day since I'd had a peep. Now if he had been the sort who occasionally stops to look at a bit of scenery, perhaps what follows might never have happened to him, for the cove there is an exquisite little nook. Exquisite. But he isn't. Such things mean nothing to him. He cannot admire the scenery more cleverly or more brilliantly than anyone else. I maintain that he has not those resources within himself that teach one the wonders of nature, and make one, so to speak, self-supporting as far as inspiration goes. Alone without a cricket bat, a tennis racket or a gun or a rod, he is very little use—that is. he is very little use considering that he is such a brilliant fellow. For he is that; but brilliant people, you'll observe, are like matches. They need a box to strike on.

That reminded me. Had I matches? Yes.

I went on ahead, calling to him to follow, and he did. He followed me to see what I was doing, and I still called him on, a little ahead, and he followed, for I was still too far ahead to hear him and he wasn't going to turn round and go back without asking me what in thunder I thought I was doing, and telling me that I was a silly ass to do it.

I always carry a flash-lamp with me knocking about the country. Dan laughs at me and says it is old-maidish but that is just exactly where he is wrong.

I don't say that I need one, but they are very jolly little things, just what a boy would have revelled in. They were not invented when I was a youngster, so for old time's sake and to please the boy I once was I carry one about. My revolver belongs to that boy really and a particularly expensive set of tools I never use.

It is an odd gratification to me to buy luxuries that were not within his reach, and many a box of fat Carlsbad plums and liqueur cherries embedded in chocolate I've purchased and slowly eaten, by way of giving him a treat and to show the poor little chap that I've not entirely forgotten him.

Selfish. Oh, I don't think so.

We climbed in. The flash-light gave me the advantage. I could get ahead stoopingly by its light fairly quickly. Dan had to stumble along by the sound of my movements and voice. I couldn't go too far. That would have been to arouse his suspicion, so I let him get within hearing and played my lamp around the first biggish opening we got to, which was an extraordinarily interesting sight, as the quartz crystals are so beautiful and so clear, except where they are stained flush-red from the nearness of the adjacent sandstone. It was a natural Aladdin's cave hung with many-sided jewel-like pendent stalactites as well as stalagmites that had the appearance of big piles of uncut or partly cut diamonds and rubies lying in careless profusion whichever way we looked.

Dan whistled as I switched my light knowingly from side to side, getting them to glitter and radiate.

"By Jingo! What a gorgeous cave! I'd no idea there was a place like this round here."

He'd heard of it regularly, repeatedly. I flashed my light, intentionally getting dazzling gleams.

"It's like a pirates' cave full of loot. 'Pon my word, it's like a tale of buried treasure. Show me the light here. These fellows look as if you could pick 'em up, but of course they are all solid." He kicked with his shoe at a mass and finding that useless, picked up a loose lump and struck at a pile of rectangular crystal cubes of all sorts and got himself a large clear bit off. "This will do for a paper-weight if it's polished," pocketing it. "I'd like to look round a bit. I've never seen anything like this."

Now that he was there, as I had guessed, he would

look round thoroughly. He didn't mind doing so, finding himself there. There was nothing against a chap who *happened to be* in an interesting spot, taking a look at anything noteworthy there. The crime lay in going specially to see it! The breach of social etiquette, the sin against his class, would be in that.

I made a mental calculation that anything over twenty minutes now would bring the water into the lowest crevice; forty-five would bring it up to the second, which was still ahead of us, but the getting to which was now a foregone conclusion thanks to his appetite for difficulties. We had to climb a bit to get to the aperture but, after entering, the slant was down and would slant still farther, as he would find as soon as he took it into his head to explore farther.

"You seem quite at home here, Peter."

"I've been here several times."

"What an extraordinary fellow you are. You never said anything about this wonderful place. What makes you so secretive?"

"I don't know really."

I'd mentioned the place over and over again before him, and Professor Meakin and I had had a long and learned disputation in his presence about it not above three weeks before.

"Does it go far?"

"Miles and miles and miles."

"Miles and miles and miles. Why, at that rate one could easily lose oneself in it."

"People have done so, often."

"Do they?" This was more than interesting. "Then it has never been properly explored."

"I shouldn't think so. I've heard of one man who got almost five miles into it but finally gave it up as it showed no signs of coming to an end. He was constantly getting lost in the ramifications and side alleys, of which I hear there are dozens, and most confusing."

"How careless of the authorities not to investigate thoroughly. No one knows what might not be found;

perhaps prehistoric remains of animals or even of their hunters."

This wasn't how he looked at it really. He didn't care what could be found. The thing was, that it was full of difficulty, and that a man might get lost in it and wander round and round and never be heard of again.

I crawled ahead, sure now that he would follow me. We went down cautiously and got past the damp pebbly bottom of the second chamber or pocket which in time would be filled direct from the sea's own inexhaustible reservoir. Already the damp was apparent under my feet. It wouldn't be so long now, and the chamber would be filled thoroughly. There would be no egress possible once that happened till at least midnight. I wondered if the seaweed on the roof would be very noticeable, but Dan had nothing to say about it, only prompting me to get on ahead with that light or else would I let him get on ahead with it, as I was such an old slow-coach. He was enormously intrigued by the cave.

I wasn't going to let my lamp out of my hand. I knew what I had come there for and it was necessary that I should keep that lamp right. He might have let it drop on the rock and shattered the little bull's-eye glass, and I did not relish the idea of all those hours spent in the darkness—waiting——

I pressed on a bit, he after me. Going slowly along, the little beam caught what my eye looked for, but what he, unaware of anything of the sort, would not see—a small splash of fresh white paint at intervals. If my lamp went out or I couldn't see those, it would be none too pleasant. Already I had had the choice of taking left or right three times, I think, and to have taken right when it should have been left, or the other way round, would have meant confusion to me and to what I intended. We'd have both been lost most certainly then.

I shot out my watch and glanced at its luminous

figures. The time was now half-past six. There were still markings if I went straight along to last another hour, I judged ; beyond them I did not want to go, for apart from the fact that it was not necessary, the advance in a crouching posture was very tiring and to lift one's head unwarily was to receive a bang on the cranium or brow which caused one to see dancing stars for certainly several moments. I'd had to explain the presence of a livid weal got in this way last week and strained my prevaricating powers to their limit.

I made as if to advance no farther, not wishing to show my eagerness, but Dan continued to urge me on. This was the best difficulty he'd come across for a long time. As long as the paint was there I didn't mind going on, but wild horses would not get me farther after that. It wouldn't be necessary, for the figure-of-eight trap to which we were gradually getting, and which I had carefully marked out, would leave him in my hands completely. Without knowing it, he would be obliged to obey me unquestioned. We'd be getting there soon, and turning round the first irregular divisional pillar (which produced what looked like a long passage, but which was truly an elongated-triangular-based, curving column) and keeping it on the left, I could lead him right round and in and out of the other one, which was if anything larger, and so fog him utterly.

The coast-watcher, well tipped, had explained the possibilities of these curving columns to me. Would-be explorers spent hours wandering back and forth around them. Unless you knew enough to turn sharp to the right you were bound to keep on in and out, in and out of these, losing your sense of direction and thinking you were going forward constantly. Their openings handed you on, one to another ; you seemed indeed to have no choice.

By the way, in case it should be thought I had brought Dan there to do him any bodily harm, I may say here

that nothing was further from my mind. Indeed so far from it were my intentions that I had risked detection by bringing a pocketful of biscuits and a large slab of chocolate to stay the pangs of his hunger. Dan was ever a good trencher-man, and as time would go by in the cave he'd get hungry. For though when he set out in quest of adventure he seemed to forget all about his inner man, this affair of the cave was not an adventure. It was merely a ruse, a try-on.

The figure of eight served its purpose admirably and *ad infinitum*. We went back and forth repeatedly and Dan never noticed it was over the same ground. I flashed the light now here, now there, so that no part could be recognised as he saw it, a second time. I led him along and through, and he followed me placidly, convinced that we were penetrating farther and farther into the heart of the land. I don't know how long we were engaged this way. It seemed an unconscionable time in that stuffy and earth- and stone-smelling spot, but I knew its passing had made a certainty of the entering of enough water to the caverns. By now they must certainly both be almost full. This dodge had made assurance doubly sure. There was no excitement in the cave for me beyond the satisfaction of getting Dan as far in as I wanted him to go, and the thought that perhaps, having got him to go so far, he might utterly insist upon going farther, which would not suit me at all. I left a certain margin beyond the pillars, but as soon as my lamp failed to discover another paint mark I knew that I had had enough exploring, and that if it sufficed me it must also suffice Dan. We had been in the place for quite a long time already and I was getting very bored with the stooping and the crawling along and the stuffiness. I'm not sedentary, even if it pleases certain people to say I am, but I'd rather walk upright if I can, so having reached what I considered then the final and suitable spot, I very carefully gave my head a painless shocking bad bump, and collapsed on to a stalagmite

—a most dreadfully sharp affair. I groaned, and almost let the lamp out of my hand through over-acting about the bump. I sat on the stalagmite while my companion gave me a lecture about carelessness. People who explored subterranean caverns and pursued entrancing difficulties had to be careful. The very essence of the thing was not to bump oneself. No real explorer ever allowed himself to get bumped. I listened, long enough for him to think I was taking what he said to heart, but I felt the time had come to endeavour to regain the outer regions once more. I was very sorry, I said, but I must have air. I gasped realistically and asked for air. If he was so enamoured of the cave, let him come on his own with his own lamp and tackle and explore it. The cave had been there for years, and was not about to move away. I'd had enough. I turned about carefully and set out ostensibly to find the entrance. It was getting late, and Celia would be getting anxious and wondering where we were. Our absence if we got lost would cause her anxiety, would he bear that in mind. But Dan would bear nothing in mind if there was a difficulty to be surmounted. Over an hour of shuffling and crawling and with occasionally a certain number of paces walked cautiously upright brought us to pocket number two. It was nicely full when we got there and Dan whistled with interest to find it so. He was pleased to see that it was not, after all, so tame an affair as it might have been. He listened carefully as I explained that my longing for the outer air would now have to be deferred for some time, and I gave him a rough estimate of the outgoing of the tide. I didn't say how long it would be before we could get out. I only said we would have to possess our souls in patience for more than one hour—I did not dare say three. He hated the thought of sitting still surrounded by unfathomed difficulties. He was entirely for turning back and starting from where we had left off. But I definitely stated that further explorations were not in my line that evening

owing to the blow I had received on my head, and the best or only thing to do was to sit down in the nearest widened portion and just wait till we could get out. I heaped coals of fire on his head by not reproaching him or reminding him that if he hadn't delayed by urging me to go so far, and consequently wasting so much time, we should have got out before the tide came in. Compunction softened his manner to me, so I forgave him with tired grace as he helped me to get comfortably established on a piece of rock which couldn't have had more than one hundred separate quartz spikes on it.

We sat ourselves down to wait, and my head really did ache a bit, not from the bump I hadn't had, but from the stuffiness and stooping and the intense blackness. It would be very uncomfortable and very tedious. I would have to fix my thoughts on the great ultimate value to be gained to pass away the time and keep myself from getting irritable. I'm not awfully keen on being uncomfortable. Fortunately Dan will endure any discomfort as long as it is hitched on to a difficulty, but if he did say anything I would remind him that he had added Spartan resignation to his Christmas tree and this was a chance to try his new toy. He mightn't get such another chance for a long time. I put the idea where I could lay my hand on it. The flash-lamp suddenly seemed to get fatigued and didn't give light properly. It would work for a few moments and then go off. One had to keep pressing on it and letting the spring up and pressing it again to get any gleam from it. It was going to be gloomy work sitting there like that.

I bethought me and plunged my hands into the pockets of my old Norfolk jacket and uttered an excellently simulated exclamation of astonishment.

"What is it?"

"Why, I've found something. What luck. I've got three—four—five biscuits—a bit stale, but all right bar that—and a slab of chocolate."

"I say, what luck. What *luck*. But what a *co-incidence*."

"Yes," hurriedly. "I'd no *idea* they were there. I must have popped them in the day of the picnic to the island and forgotten all about them."

(I'd put them there that morning, but the biscuits were stale. I'd kept them purposely.)

"Not a doubt of it. What coat is that? The old Norfolk? Did you wear it that day?"

"Yes, rather." And I had, specially, with an eye to this occasion. I had prepared well ahead, and guessing I might be asked to account for the presence of biscuits and chocolates, now I was able to say "rather" with a ring of sincerity which would quite put Dan off the track of suspecting me of anything. There's nothing like the truth. It gets into the voice so.

"Yes, I remember now. I remember wondering why on earth you wore it that day, because it was funny and unlike you to wear such a coat. You are usually so frightfully particular."

"Why shouldn't I wear it?" touchily.

"Oh, I don't know. Everyone to his taste. Personally I can't stand a Norfolk coat. They're so utterly beyond everything."

"Utterly beyond everything?"

"Yes, of course; they're so like Norfolk, and there you are."

"Like Norfolk? What do you mean? I'm afraid I can't see."

Dan has always some fault to find with my things.

"Why, of course you must see what I mean. They're so low—like Norfolk."

"Ugh! I'm not surprised I didn't see that. I'm not good at seeing jokes in the dark, especially bad ones."

"All serene. Pax. I forgot you had a head. I say, you know, these biscuits are good, munched with a slab of chocolate like this."

Association of ideas, as we munched and swallowed, led us to talk of the island picnic of the previous week, and of the local celebrities who had been wakened up by Celia out of a sleep into which they had fallen some years before to come to it.

We argued as to whether there were four Miss Bracegirdles present, or only three. We counted. There was the one who looked like a fish and one who looked like a parrot and one who looked like a mixture of the two and the one who looked like neither and would have been quite pretty if someone had kissed her and cheered her up a bit. We agreed to four.

It was a good thing I had brought the biscuits. We'd have fainted with exhaustion, I think, without. I hadn't brought cigarettes, and this was, I think, a masterstroke. No one, least of all Dan, would ever think I had deliberately come out, meaning to be out for several hours, without bringing a plentiful supply of cigarettes. The presence of the biscuits was more than expunged by the absence of the cigarettes. I was suffering greatly from the want of one now, and I would either have to go without or else smoke one of Dan's awful things, which were strangely compounded with some Eastern perfume, some aromatic stuff which made them smell like hair oil and taste of Turkish delight.

But I was driven to ask for one and lit it and thought how much better it was than nothing at all.

And there we were waiting there, our two cigarettes' ends glowing in the darkness of the cave like two little red stars.

Their soothing effect produced silence for a space and we sat inhaling gratefully.

"Do you hear something moving?" I said idly—"a sort of little scuttle?"

"Yes, I think I do. A mouse, perhaps. Switch on the light. That is, if you can."

It went on, revealing an enormous spider not so far as all that from my elbow. A colossal spider, a monster, a whacker, a Goliath. The noise we had heard was

made by it in its approach. We'd heard its footsteps, and it must be granted that a spider whose footsteps can be heard in the dark can't be anything but a large spider.

It stood motionless, regarding us with a hang-dog expression. I shuddered. It was a creepy, whiskery brute. Not a thing I'd make a pet of under any circumstances.

The light stayed on.

"It doesn't seem a bit afraid of us, does it, standing there, not making any attempt to run away?"

"Afraid of us? Not it. It knows quite well we're afraid of it. It reminds me of something or somebody we ran away from. Let me think. Why, of course, the curate. Don't you remember the day he called, the very wet day, and we all bolted so meanly and left him to Celia? It's got galoshes on just like he had."

There was a sort of thickening at the base of each leg. The spider seemed to have several pairs of galoshes on, outdoing the curate altogether, who only had one pair and removed them in the hall. It had something the same expression that I had seen on the face of the curate. I think finding us all up at the bungalow making merry had stirred some recollection of his unclerical days, and I think he felt he'd like to be back in the world once more. He had looked peevish and depressed at first, but when we trooped back shamefacedly later in answer to a summons from the gong at half-past four, he was radiant and talking vivaciously. I saw that Celia the kind-hearted had persuaded him that it was only a matter of a few years before he became a bishop with ten thousand a year and a palace and a helpmeet. Every curate who strays across Celia's path knows it is only a matter of sticking to it to become a bishop in the end. She exhilarates and comforts them and gently instils this feeling into them and forbears entirely to point out that the last stage must be far, far worse than the first.

I threw a small lump of biscuit at the grey spider

and had the satisfaction of seeing him scuttle off to his bishopric. The light went off arbitrarily again.

Unless I kept Dan's mind working in some other direction he might begin to put two and two together and this wouldn't do.

I cast about.

"An *awful* thing happened to me the other day——"

"Really! What?" The lamp went on suddenly and a gleam lit up his handsome virile face. Too handsome and virile to please me. The light caught and flickered on his dark reddish-black lashes and the small moustache clipped to within an inch of its life literally. It blazed against his grand hard red-brown eyes. I wondered why his eyes did not gleam in the dark like a leopard's or a jaguar's, and why he could not see in the dark with them, for he was like a combination of these two animals, and herein I think lay his fascination for women, even those older than he was himself. He seemed to me a primeval creature.

He didn't appear disturbed at my saying that something awful had happened to me. I think he considers that I misuse the word inasmuch as I use it quite differently from what he does, applying it to mental catastrophes. If I offended anyone I'd say it was an awful thing, provided I hadn't done it on purpose—of *malice prepense*, as they say. If I discussed a well-known tennis player's unsporting methods at a garden-party and found that her husband was sitting listening, I'd say it was an awful thing, even if I heard afterwards he subscribed heartily to all I said. Or if I discussed the relative merits of various brands of pickles with a man who was a wholesale maker of them, and was quite unnecessarily trying to forget the fact, I'd think I'd done an awful thing. Dan would say it was an awful thing if he had meant to back the winner of the National and had allowed himself to be put off it by some idiot just as he was going to wire his bet away; or if he had failed to land a salmon after a long struggle with it; or missed a woodcock which had passed over him, and which was

then brought down by the man on his right, who'd left it to him when it was something of an open question as to whose bird it was. But he wouldn't apply the term to any lesser catastrophe.

"Really! What was it?" he said calmly, pushing his cigarette-case over to me in the dark. I took it.

"I read a book by Henry James."

"Well, there's nothing very awful about that, is there?"

"Isn't there, though? You don't understand these things."

"I've always understood that Henry James was a very fine writer."

"So he is. There never was a finer. Nor ever will be. That's the tragedy of it. Having read one of his books, now I shall never be able to get any pleasure out of reading anyone else ever again. It's quite one of the worst things that has ever happened to me."

"You carry things to extremes if ever I met a man who did. Extraordinary how little effect Celia——"

"Yes. Go on."

"Oh, nothing. Or I suppose as I've begun it I'll have to finish it, for you'll not be satisfied unless I tell you what I was going to say. You're Celia's one failure."

"Thanks awfully," with dignity.

"Don't get ratty. It's a compliment. If a man persists in being weak-minded when all his friends unite —yes—honestly unite in trying to knock some sense into him——"

"Yes?"

"Well, it seems to show—I'm not at all sure but that it shows his strong-mindedness. Go back to what you were saying about Henry James. He's written a whole heap of books. You can read those if you're too grand or too silly to read anyone else."

"No, I can't read them because I've read them all. The day I finished the first book I wired to the publisher and I got the whole lot by return and read them

straight off. My reading days are over. I couldn't look at another page. I assure you, Dan, it is a tragedy for a man to be cursed with a craving for the very best, and having got it, such an intense appreciation of it. It has been my bane all my life, for it narrows it down so terribly. You know, of course, there is only one artist I can stand——"

"Oh, don't begin about that, Peter," wearily.

"—and one playwright——"

"Spare me that now. This bit of rock I am sitting on is so hard."

"And one poem——"

"*The Rubaiyât* of Omar, of course?"

"Yes. And only one person I could care for."

I thought this might lead up to the one subject I really cared about and which, nearest my heart, was responsible for our being there discussing it. But it did not draw Dan out to give me any information. He only burst into guffaws of laughter—that is, the nearest to a guffaw that a really first-class, well-bred, well-schooled sporting man like Dan would indulge in, whose mirth except on certain indicated occasions never gets beyond his shoulders. I couldn't see them moving, but I guessed they were going.

"Oh, cut it short, Peter! I might stand this sort of thing in broad daylight, but here in the dark it is too much."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? I mean you're the biggest old flirt I've ever struck. I've never seen such a fellow. The least little bit of a frill coming round the corner and you are all eyes and ears. You're rich, that's what you are."

I made no reply. I was partly incensed and partly amazed. It's really extraordinary how I have the faculty of striking people in a totally opposite way to the way I ought to strike them.

No one sees me as I really am. What a curious thing that is. Is it a gift or what? If it is a gift it is

wasted on me. I should have been a burglar or an embezzler and I'd have passed for an honest man and then it would have been profitable to me. As things were, it was merely annoying. But as Dan wasn't the only person who misunderstood me, why be angry with him—over this at any rate? The fault, if fault there were, lay in myself or my ancestors, or else in my upbringing. I thought I'd note the matter for careful analysis later with a view to incorporating it in some literary matter I had begun. On the other hand—dark thought—was this attitude of Dan's (not new to me, nor disguised to others) deliberately adopted to prejudice a certain person against me?

In either case I'd note it for analysis. I switched on, and pulling out my old papers and letters, sought a spare piece, but in vain, as they were all closely covered, criss-cross, with other notes. I therefore asked Dan if he could oblige me with a piece. I'd asked him several times lately, designedly. I asked him now again. It was an opportunity.

He drew out his pocketful of papers.

There it was again.

Or was it they, plural? I pushed the light closer viciously.

Was it the same or another? Was it more than one, or was it only one? And if one, was it a different one to the one I had seen last on Friday, or the one I had seen on Monday? And which would be the worse and point to the worst for me?

I couldn't mistake the handwriting, bold and free, and one or two words underlined with double wavy lines that were so like the representation of the waves as pictured by the queenly needlewoman Matilda of Flanders in the Bayeux Tapestry. As a child I used to be taken to the Museum on wet days and expected to admire this piece of embroidered history. There were three wavy lines under the keel of the Conqueror's ships to indicate the sea. Celia only puts two under a word,

usually, unless it's something very urgent, and then, like Matilda, she puts three.

There was something very urgent in the letter to Dan, this letter which he carried about with him so sedulously, for one sentence had three wavy lines under it, I now saw. Unless it was the same letter turned another way round, it was another letter. That's not a very clear way of putting it ; what I mean is that last time I asked (on purpose) for a bit of paper from him the words underlined had only two lines under them. If it's another letter, I thought, it looks bad. If a person is not satisfied with talking to a person who is staying under the same roof, but also feels it imperative to write as well, it's very peculiar and indicative of an extraordinarily highly developed interest in the person to whom the letters are sent. Also if it's the same letter refolded it's bad, as it means the recipient is reading it over and over again, and there must be something very gratifying and delightful in the letter.

This would be the sixth time I had seen him produce Celia's letter (or letters) out of his breast-pocket, and each time the breast-pocket belonged to a different coat. That is very peculiar too. If a man carries letters about at all it's bad enough, but if he goes to the length of changing them into the pocket of every different coat he gets into during the course of the day it looks very marked. The first time I had accidentally asked for the loan of a scrap of paper to make a note on he was wearing a blazer ; I noticed it then, but did not think any more of it. The next time I asked him accidentally he was wearing a dinner-jacket. The next time (when I asked him purposely) he was wearing an ordinary blue lounge suit ; the next time a dinner-jacket (I asked him purposely, to see if it were accidental and if he hadn't changed the papers even if he had changed his coat). Again in the blazer and now again here (more or less accidentally, as I had partly forgotten about it). Why should Dan get letters from Celia like this ? I've never had a letter or letters

from Celia while I was staying under the same roof with her.

"If I were afflicted with this mania of yours for constantly making notes I'd have the common decency to carry a few odd scraps of paper about myself. These are all very important letters I've got here. I can't possibly nibble any more off them without injuring their contents."

He replaced the bundle. I gnashed my even teeth; the sight of that letter made me fume with impatience.

I could hardly wait for the time of the lowering of the water in the two chambers and of our exit from the cave, staggering blindly out into the moonlight into the midst of the little eager, anxious crowd which would gather there in the forlorn hope that, as no trace of us could be found anywhere else along the coast or in the village, we might as a last ninety-ninth chance out of a hundred be found there. As dinner-time approached our absence would be marked, and dinner postponed, but even that later-than-ordinary festive board would not be graced by our presence, and our absence acutely felt and commented upon. Vera would run down and look for the boat and the canoe and see them drawn up, tarpaulined. No calamity in that quarter to be looked for. Then a half-fed band in macintoshes or coats thrown on over evening dresses would run out of the big bungalow's ever-open door, and make up and down shore for signs of discarded raiment, in some cove or other, to show where we two had, in that mellow afternoon, gone in for what was to be our last plunge in that blue sea which abounds so invitingly on every hand. But there would be no discarded raiment blowing about looking for an owner who lay cold and enwreathed with seaweed in some greener, deeper, colder part, by rocks, whilst a companion equally chilled and indifferent as to what became of his blazer and best tan shoes drifted out to sea on the current.

The anxiety (I was sorry when I thought of it, but

there was no help for it) would mount up apace. All the little annoying things we had ever done would be all forgotten, including the last small crime, our extreme lateness for dinner. How lavishly they would feed us, and not reproach us, if only we would turn up. The entire household would remain afoot, to lovingly minister to all our wants, if only we would come back. If it meant staying up all night, they would do this for us, if only we would come back.

I glanced at the time. Nine-thirty. As we dined at eight-thirty, they would not have reached this stage of frenzied anxiety and self-reproach yet. As yet they would still be fretfully accusing us or half laughingly pretending that there was nothing so odd or unusual in two exceptionally nice men (if you had hunted Europe you couldn't have found two nicer men, each in his own way) going out for a walk, when they were staying on a visit in a district more or less unknown to them, and not getting back till later than the usual dinner hour.

"Let everything be kept hot, please, and nice!"

There were still two and a half solid hours to be got through before the final *dénouement* could transpire. How on earth to keep Dan's mind off the two-and-two makes-four track? A nod's as good as a wink to that bright lad at any time. There were so many things might strike him. My slipping so quickly ahead and leading the way in so pointedly; my persuading him to come at all; my knowledge of the chambers filling with the rising of the tide and my familiarity with those black passages we'd just left.

I felt a wave of anxious doubt come over me. I ran on mentally and saw his fury if he found I'd got him there on purpose. Against his will, he'd call it, though, as he didn't know he was going there, he couldn't have made up his mind not to go there very well. But it would be in the nature of a hoax, and hoaxes were things he and his friends played off upon others, not they on them.

I reined myself in. It was all too subtle, too deeply embedded in involved circumstances for a brain such as his to grasp ; a brain which was so acute in matters of action would fail here. The roundabout method of arriving at a conclusion or piece of knowledge which had been evolved by the brain of a Phryné would be a method unknown to a man of his direct dealings, no matter how it would appeal to a man like me.

Out of mercy to him, I must try and pass the time away, and later we could doze. What was that awful story of that great Scotch feud ? Let me see. Could I recall any of it ? It was years since I'd heard of it. Two hundred MacSomeones were being pursued by a greatly superior force of MacSomebodyelses, but succeeded in giving them the slip and got to a deep cave which afforded a perfect hiding-place. Most unfortunately for them, their footsteps were tracked in the snow to their lair by one of the kilted savages of the clan that pursued them and thirsted for their blood. At the news the whole crew of MacSomebodyelses came whooping and howling outside the opening, and furiously gathered together wood and straw to make a pyre and burn them out. Before the flames took hold they got information that one of their own clan was a prisoner with the others, so they stamped the fire out and called for him, offering to spare the lives of four others as well if he were allowed out. But he was a gentleman and refused the offer, preferring to die with the rest. So the flames were set going again and they all perished miserably, while the MacSomebodyelses hooted and hecked outside. It's a true story and it happened not so long ago, and the straw the poor MacSomeones slept on is still undisturbed and their clean white bones are clustered by the cave's entrance.

I hadn't the place right, or the names or the dates, but that wouldn't matter. The bits about the pursuit and the tracks in the snow and the cruel lighting of the fire, by which one lot of human beings condemned another lot of human beings to suffocate to death, were

the bits that would interest Dan, so I cleared my throat preparatory to telling him the story. But he saved me the trouble.

"You know, Blenerhassett, as a would-be writer, you ought to find me rather an interesting study."

Good old damp cloth! I would be plane sailing now for a bit.

"I do find you an interesting study, and you are quite the sort of perplexing compound that writers do like to study and use, I could ring the changes on your various points over and over again. I could work up materials for four or five different characters—main characters—from you alone. Why"—a thought surged up in my brain like a wave, and broke, leaving an idea behind—"each time I've asked you for a piece of paper to make a note on, it's been to make a note about you!"

"You don't say."

"Yes. Isn't it Gilbertian?"

"Quite, in a way." I think he wished he had spared me a piece when I asked him.

After this he'd carry reams about for me. But what about that letter? What about that letter?

He resumed: "I know—that is—I've always had a sort of a kind of a feeling that I am rather unusual."

It's a funny thing. It infuriates me to be thought unusual. He glories in it.

"In what sort of a way would you say I was unusual?"

"Well, I don't know. It's so hard to say, such a shade will make such a big difference. I've made the notes, but, as you see, I've not analysed them, and rough notes without analysis are worse than useless to the eye of anyone but the author."

I could not very well have told him the purport of the notes I had made. It wasn't actually true that each time I'd borrowed bits of paper from him I was noting phases of his character, but for all that

I often did make notes on the manifestations of contradictory and conflicting qualities he gave, just as I did so about everyone who came my way. As the incident of the letter probably turned on his possessing an unusual character, I ought to be wildly interested in him. I ought to be wildly interested in him because someone I was wildly interested in was wildly interested in him (judging by the letter or letters). Some of the notes I had made were far from complimentary, as they set forth his extraordinary conventionality over some things, such as the fact of his never letting me take him to see anything that would add to his store of knowledge and refusing coldly the educational books I often offered to lend him. I couldn't tell him very well that I had made a note that if he'd pry about a bit more into all the interesting things in nature and such natural phenomena as had no direct bearing on salmon fishing or snipe and woodcock shooting; that he might find he would obtain information that would throw sidelights upon his own actions. So I thought a bit and said untruthfully: "Well, you are so unselfconscious, for one thing, and that's so unusual."

If you want to impress upon a person that you are the possessor of unlimited prescience and clearness of vision, set before them a picture of their character which is the direct opposite to what you positively know it ought to be. It doesn't suit me personally to be misjudged, for I consider I've got a really nice character, but in nine cases out of ten you can't do a greater kindness to a person than to misjudge them.

They'll thank you for it as a rule.

But Dan didn't seem overjoyed. "Yes, I am, I suppose," he said in a set-back voice. He was so sure of this that it fell flat. It was unusual, of course, but unexcitingly unusual. He felt he was unusual in some much larger, grander way than this. "But haven't you noticed it in several other ways?"

"Oh, rather! Rather!"

I sat silent, thinking what else I could hand him out,

but I couldn't lay hold of anything just then. I wanted something that would start him off and leave me comfortably—more or less—listening and agreeing as before.

But he went on again without my help. "Perhaps you've got those notes on you you made about me," he laughed a bit awkwardly, with pretended offhandedness. "I'd like to see what you noted. Writing must be interesting work."

I put my hand into my chest and pulled out my collection. He'd seen me earlier searching among them, and had seen there were a lot of odds and ends there, so I couldn't very well deny there was a chance of them being among them. I turned them over. The light stayed on just because I would just as soon it hadn't.

"There. I see a bit there that came off one of my letters; I can show you the rest of it. And there's another. I tore the flap off this envelope here."

He had his bundle out. I took a look at the three wavy lines. Something very urgent, evidently. He replaced his letters.

"Now what does the first scrap say?"

I turned it about in the light. There were a lot of half-erased and rubbed words and phrases in pencil, all indistinct. The only one I could decipher was something about "a lot of drab pebbles in a room, one coloured."

What on earth could that mean? What possible sense could be got out of that? Something must have struck me in connection with an idea of this sort, but what sense could one get out of that string of meaningless words. Whoever heard of pebbles in a room, and why should they be drab and one coloured? I hadn't the foggiest notion.

I knit my brows. I must fit a meaning to them. I should set myself up to be scoffed at for ever as a maundering idiot who worried people for bits of paper to make notes on, carried them about for days and weeks and then forgot what they were about. I would never hear the end of this.

I had it. I unknit my brows and smoothed the paper out simultaneously, and explained that when one wrote delicate personal observations about people who were fellow-guests under the same roof, one couched them in obscure language, so that if the housemaid dusted them and read them accidentally she would still be in the dark as to what it was all about. It would show great want of delicacy on the part of a writer to leave detailed notes lying about with the name of the person analysed attached. But this was not so obscure really. The meaning was clear to anyone with vision. It was my way of putting it that Dan would stand out conspicuously in any room, in any society. Beside him in his unusualness others were as drab pebbles. He was the coloured pebble among them.

He was delighted with the simile, repeated it and chuckled over it ; he was quite touched in his pride over it. He felt it was really a good way of putting it. Didn't want to brag or anything of that sort, but people were drab, take them for all in all—weren't they ? "

I said yes, I must have thought so, or I'd have hardly gone to the trouble of worrying someone to lend me a scrap of paper to write it down.

Dan pressed his cigarettes on me, for he was awfully pleased. I felt I had got out of that wood all right, but in the act of lighting up he suddenly paused, seemed to turn the thing over in his mind, held the match up to my face, looked searchingly at me and asked if I wasn't making some stupid allusion to the fact that he had red hair, because if so it was a bit thick. He was so absolutely fed up—here the match flickered and went out—at the way people went on about his red hair. As if it wasn't as good a colour as any other.

I thrust the suggestion from me strongly. Was it likely that I would go to the trouble to make a note on an obvious thing like that, or refer to it ? I who prided myself on being the possessor of a form of subtlety only to be equalled in the Orient ? Good

writers never dreamt of mentioning the colour of the hair of their characters. You were left to guess what the colour was and to decide for yourself whether the person's hair you were reading about were blue, green, grey, or yellow, or whether they had any at all. It was very low-class writing to mention the colour of anything. Colour in literature was out of place. Perish the thought. No, his hair was wonderful and one of his most attractive physical attributes, but if I brought him into a book I'd say nothing whatever about it. The colour of a man's hair couldn't decide his future or have any bearing on his actions.

Dan said he thought red hair might.

I thought a moment. Yes, I said, red hair might. On second thoughts, if a person's hair did get entangled with the action of a story, the chances were it would be red.

"I'd rather not, I admit, make an enemy of a red-haired man." I was pensively inhaling one of Dan's cigarettes and trying to pretend to myself I didn't dislike the taste of it. "Though, as a matter of fact, and sad to relate, enemies of all sorts are necessary to me, whether red or not, and perhaps all the better for that. I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to get on at all without a lot."

"There you go again. Whoever but you would say a thing like that? That is a topsy-turvy remark. A few enemies to buck one up and keep one from getting utterly stagnant are no doubt no disadvantage, but it's not by enmities but by friendships a fellow's going to boost himself along."

"You've touched on a very peculiar thing in saying that. Talking about any old thing, just as we are doing here now, has the charm that you never know when it won't lead up to something really interesting. I am trying to become a writer, am I not?"

"Yes, and doing very well at it, I consider."

Dan was inclined to behave handsomely to me about it, after my admission that he had formed the subject

of several of my notes, and sooner or later might expect to figure in my writings.

"And the peculiar and sad part of it is that I can only write about people I either love very much or dislike very much—either case establishes a sort of intense, watchful and understanding communication between them and me. I know exactly what they are thinking about and feeling and going to do, and all about them. It's most annoying and quite against my nature. Here am I, a naturally peaceful, kindly man, and by this unfortunate kink in me I shall be obliged to go on making enemies, doing things to annoy people and bait and goad them on. As soon as I've got someone to dislike me and I dislike them in return I'll concentrate on them with a furious intensity and succeed in giving a portrait which will move and talk as if possessed of complete life. No detail will escape me, which if recorded will make them live more utterly. I shall make notes by the hundreds and thousands then. But I'll either have to go on making enemies or else give up writing, for, as I told you before, there is only one person—I could possibly love."

Dan went off into more suppressed guffaws. Till ten past eleven he proved to me conclusively that he'd never met a man more absurdly and ludicrously prone to come under the influence of anything stray and winsome that came within range of my eyeglass than I. There never was a man so catholic in his tastes there. He'd often, just to amuse himself, tried to pin me to a type, but he couldn't. As soon as he thought he'd discovered it, I went off at a tangent after something that upset all his theories. Variations of colour, height or disposition didn't seem to matter in the very least. Any old thing did the trick, he almost believed. I listened.

It was certainly his game, say what one would, I decided, to affect to believe this and to make me appear in a certain quarter in the light of a philanderer. But

having wind of it now, I would circumvent it by every means possible. I'd ignore ever person of the opposite sex who came my way, religiously.

Soon too I should have some material proof with which to go on my way, and so be better able to guide my footsteps. Till then I would keep calm and reserve myself for either keen joy or keen disappointment.

I had read an article in a magazine on longevity which proved beyond dispute that every time one lost one's temper one shortened one's life, so I let him proceed without further ado. It was not till ten past eleven that I shunted him off my defects and got him on to his perfections. He found the darkness helped him to concentrate. Once I had got him to start I gave up listening and just inflected, and stirred him up with a word now and again. By now at the bungalow they would be in a great stew. They would have taken toll of all our virtues and added a great many to them we had never possessed. All our frowardness and anything untoward about us would be forgotten. They would have returned from one search and be starting upon another, after having taken counsel in the house, and having rung up the neighbours for assistance. Celia, drawing on a mackintosh or a coat over her evening dress, would be remembering my long lashes, my even teeth, the distinction of my bearing, the welcome that was always in my eyes for her. My dog-like devotion.

That is unless she were too occupied in remembering the lithe, muscular beauty of Dan's figure, the crisp reddish shade of his hair, the fineness of his hands, his great talent for music. I gritted my even teeth once more.

But I would know soon whose virtues, of us two, she would choose to dwell on. The mystery of that letter (or those letters) would soon be cleared up for ever. To clear it up, I had borrowed an idea from antiquity, from a lady who was, I must say, not altogether as

blameless as she was beautiful, Phryné. But her beauty was so great, it is said, that as a standard of conduct it might have been impossible to keep pace with. She was very subtle, and to be very subtle and very beautiful is a double event of some magnitude. To be very subtle, very beautiful and very good is a treble event that rarely gets past the post, and all allowances should be made. She was after a piece of information which was not exactly to the interest of the person she questioned to impart to her. Praxiteles, in a fit of generosity begotten of dipping his purely Greek nose in the chased wine-cup, had given her out of all his works her choice of any one as a gift. She wanted to choose the best, and she meant to get the best, and not trusting to her powers of selection, she determined that he should unconsciously effect the choice for her. So she had recourse to a stratagem. She caused a false alarm of fire to be given at his house and transmitted to him at hers, whereupon he rushed out, exclaiming that all was lost if his statue of Eros were touched by a spark. Next morning the artful lady sent a pack of strong slaves to bring the Eros round to her house.

As evidenced by this, a threat of danger brings out preferences very clearly, and as the matter of the letter-carrying and whatever state of affairs it indicated as existing between Dan and Celia was beginning to get on my nerves, the idea of some such test presented itself to my mind. I couldn't bribe anyone to say he and I were in danger and to note her behaviour at receiving the news. For this I'd need one or maybe two accomplices, and accomplices are dangerous things. They break down, or give your plans away, or if the plans succeed, take all the credit. I warn everyone against accomplices. If you are going to fool the world or anyone in it, do so alone.

I translated the idea and recast it in a way of my own. By now all houses in the environment would have been rung up; all suggestions as to possible whereabouts thrashed out in words or investigated in person. Re-

membering how superior we were to all other friends, and realising what a blank our absence, if unhappily permanent, would cause, the most thorough and minute inspection of any parts sufficiently adjacent to have seen us in the afternoon and evening hours would have been made. The searchers would, as a last resource, line up outside the opening to the cave, straining and hoping that when the waters fell low enough it would disgorge us. I was prepared to wade through a foot or two of water, linking my arm through that of my companion in tedium and discomfort, issuing out in the moonlight, blinking like an owl and hanging on to him. Celia, confronted by us both, and confronted by her joy at finding us still warm and breathing personalities, instead of two sea-sodden somethings, minus animation, should betray her true choice definitely by some quick movement or exclamation towards one or other of us.

We were shut up till midnight, for the water went down very gradually. It came about as I foretold. The coast-watcher, well primed by the importance of the occasion to talk on the horrors past, present and future of that portion of the outer margin of England in his charge, where her meadows slip into the sea, had grouped them there. The house-party, come back from their scattered chase without news, and despondent and wondering on that account, were now asking him what he thought and hanging on his incoherent, Dogberry-like replies. Presently his voice would hail us, booming a bit hollowly, disinclined to shout too soon, for fear that no reply would be forthcoming, thus showing that we were not even there.

It was dramatic that we should stagger out to them, not they come to us, so I went through the water up to my knees, and Dan's.

There was no moon, though she was due to be there at her fullest. Rainy clouds closed her in as we slipped and struggled out, cramped from sitting on hard rocks

for hours. It was immense relief to straighten out and to breathe the fuller air and know the thing was over. The voices of a great many people greeted us in tones of high relief. I was surprised at the number, and in the noise that they made that I couldn't detect Celia's voice. I halted a moment before going forward, well in the round pool of lantern light, that swung a bit. If I were to be Celia's choice, she would easily see me standing there. Dan slipped from beside me, but I still paused there, and in those few seconds a great soft mass hurled itself upon me, wide and damp, as if a portion of the crumbling cliff had come away and rolled itself upon me as I stood. I put my hands out, to ward it off. There was no grass upon it so it could not be the cliff. A smell of damp macintosh came strongly from it to me. It was Miss Lamb, and emotion robbed her of speech. She clasped me tightly, and I supported her as well as I could, for I was rather tottering myself. The people around forbore to congratulate me till this affecting reunion should begin to cool down.

But where was Celia ? I was still in the light of the lantern, and there were still portions of me visible here and there, bits of me projecting beyond Miss Lamb. Enough certainly to identify me to anyone who really looked for me with eyes sharpened by affection.

But she wasn't there.

Finding her voice at last, the good soul cried : " Oh, *Mr* Blenerhassett—Peter dear—you are saved. Oh, how thankful I am ! How thankful I am ! "

She wept on me and on her macintosh, which became more rubberish and wafted more strongly than before in consequence. She never said a word about Dan. I thought grimly, as I patted one plump heaving shoulder soothingly, that I had spent hours and hours in a dark disgustuous cave for the pleasure of finding out that Miss Lamb was more upset at the thought of losing me than of losing Dan. That her joy

at my being restored to her was so great that she quite forgot all about Dan. I had gone to endless trouble to find out what Celia's true feelings were about myself and Dan, and I had only succeeded in finding out what Miss Lamb's were.

Celia was not present. She didn't care about either of us! She evidently didn't take enough interest in either Dan or myself to come out and see whether we were alive or dead. She was at home playing patience by the billiard-room fire. Or writing. . . .

Vera paid no attention to me whatsoever. Her anxiety was all for Dan. In the softly falling rain she had possessed herself of one of his arms and was holding on silently. He seemed to receive this inarticulate homage with an equally intense inarticulate satisfaction. As I threaded the group with my eyes in search of Celia, I had remarked a certain something romantically tell-tale in the lines of his figure, bending to her, in the dim uncertain light. I diagnosed their mutual condition in a flash and wondered how I could have been so blind. After all, I *had* found out something quite valuable. In the words of the watcher, the coast was clear—in that direction anyhow. If I'd only used my eyes outwardly more, and turned them inwardly less, what a lot of trouble I could have saved myself!

I was naturally plied with questions, and answered them evasively. How had we got there? Why had we gone there? Why hadn't we come out again in good time? Didn't we know about the tide coming up so far and cutting us off in there? Did we realise what a fright we had given them, and that every scrap of the places about had been scoured, for they thought we had been drowned?

Now that we were safely saved, and it was found we had not undergone any very grave danger, they began to pity themselves for having had to endure so much anxiety. Our haloes melted away.

I got in my question as soon as I had staved off theirs. Where was Celia?

Miss Lamb stood still and brought all the others to a stop too.

"How stupid of me not to tell you. I was so excited I quite forgot. Quite soon after you left the house (it can't have been very long after) she got a telegram and had to catch the five-thirty-nine up to town, and very glad I am, too, that she had to go now."

Then Celia had been in the toy express as we saw it plunge into the toy tunnel, when we first set out. Of what use are human eyes that they can't see through the side of a railway carriage?

"Yes. Dan. Can you hear me, Dan?" Miss Lamb raised her voice over to him as he walked at the far side of the straggling group, with Vera. "You never posted that letter Celia gave you last week. You promised you would look up the address in the directory and put it in an envelope and post it. It was very urgent."

Ah! that accounted for the three wavy lines after the manner of Matilda.

I could hear Dan calling himself names quite audibly in the dark damp mist.

"I carried it about with me for over a week and every day I meant to attend to it. I couldn't get hold of a directory in this benighted place."

"Well, Leacock & Simpkins, not hearing, were very anxious, and wired asking her specially to go up for a personal interview on account of the delay. She'll only be one night, as she expects to get back to-morrow afternoon. But I don't blame you. Now that this has happened I don't really feel I can blame you. I can only regard it as providential. She has been spared this great anxiety."

As I said before, the moral of this tale is, don't be too subtle.

CELIA'S FLAG DAY

WHAT is the curious, the inexplicable pleasure to be got through the gazing at people who are of interest to one when they are in a total unconsciousness and unknowingness that amongst the presences about them there is one set apart from the others by an intense becalmed sort of consciousness of them. Noting every little movement that hints at small shadows of behaviour (pointing to characteristics new to the conscious one or which have been slipped over unnoticed) to be added to the image already formed and carried in the mind.

Little things peep out and pop in again. Everyone wears a little mask except when they are unconscious of observation, and not only one but a whole series of little masks, for the same mask won't meet the exigencies of one's intercourse with everyone. Some of us unfortunately have no definite stand in life—through diffidence. We stand where we are placed by our companion of the moment, high or low or midway. Sometimes very low, sometimes quite high. And a mask must be worn to suit the height or lowness of our position as we gauge it in our companion's eyes. This is not nonsense. If thought out it will be found to have germs of meaning in it. I'll call the masks veils, for mask suggests an embossed and bulky affair, and with the number needed to go about (for different places need different masks or veils) it would mean a cumbering up of oneself and one's boxes. I know that I myself have a different mask or veil to be worn with each one of my friends and relations, no matter how intimate, and the more intimate we are, the thicker. One is less at ease with those one has known best and longest; they have preconceived notions of the right and correct

forms that inwardly and outwardly one should take. To bloom in independence won't do. Whether you will be great, good, solemn or funny or rheumatic, short-sighted or sympathetic, are all things they make it their business to decide for you. If you don't conform they chill you, and you shiver as if you had halted before the open door of a cold store. Long ago, in the big family or coterie of friends or at school, corners were knocked off or tried at ; they may have come off or they may merely have disappeared temporarily, so that one appears to have that smooth uneventful formation which, beloved of society and cohorts of men, is welcomed by them. A display of mental independence of any sort is a corner. A special gift or bent, a too fervid belief in something, a too fervent disbelief, and an irrepressible talent, all are corners, bred by a multiple heredity converging to a point. But unless friends are chosen because they are cornered as you are, or have a respect for your corners, you must in intercourse with them draw a veil over your corners, which are in reality characteristics, but which society is determined to mallet or chisel off you.

You will probably need veils with friends, but you must wear them with relations from earliest nursery moments. The least revelation of fervid or original thought or anything marked calls down on one the satire of the others.

"Look at him showing off!"

"How affected she is. I can't stand her!"

I'll remove my veil in a twinkling to an utter stranger but never to a relation ; no, nor not to a relation-in-law. The intolerant judgments of the latter are not diluted by the blood-love that tempers the intolerant judgments of one's own kith ; both accept strangers as they find them, and will only accept their own in the form they choose they should appear in.

The East, less spiritual, more material, ties up its women's faces in muslin or crêpe. We of the West, all wear yashmaks, men and women alike, made of some-

thing more intangible, leaving our eyes, proving advance guards, alone visible. When I am chagrined, I wish my yashmak thicker. My face is mobile, and my friends tell me that, knowing it, it betrays me. Of course I am sensitive, morbidly so, and therefore easily set up or reduced by those about me, and the number of veils and yashmaks with which I have to cope, owing to the fact of not having the strength of mind to use the same one continuously whether people like it or not, is tremendous. Mixing as I do with different sorts and varied masses, the component individuals of which all expect different things of me, I must have a great many. Depending on whom I am with, I may as I turn my face to one, then to another, find them puzzled. To one I'm one thing, to the other another, for one expects me to be one thing, the other another. For this I need combination veils. What a curse is the adaptability which is the result of a kindly shyness. You feel you must adapt yourself or displease, and you adapt. Because of it you are ready to go to all the trouble it entails upon you, to oblige anyone, by becoming at a moment's notice anyone or anything you feel they'd expect you to be. Whereas if you decide to appear the same person to everyone you need only confess to, or be reprimanded for, one set of failings. If, as I am, you are many people in one, and never any one of them for long, you are standing there to be reviled for as many different sets of shortcomings as are thrown in with the number of characters you can assume. For don't forget that what is a virtue and an adornment in one would be counted a lack or a vice in the other, by a system of comparison which is a delicate and absurd matter. In none of your characters will you receive praise for its good points. People don't praise.

Thus, as I say, mixing with people, if one is sensitive, or has eyes that penetrate outer things, one cannot help observing that they have notions of one, and what one ought to be. (Some day may I have the privilege of staying in a house where everybody has thought better

of it and themselves and decided to be what others have decided they should be. Celia must be there, for no doubt she will be responsible for some of the freaks. That reminds me, I must write the story of the little lady who took everybody's advice and still lived.) Celia says that as I gain confidence in myself under her treatment of me this feeling that I have about myself, which necessitates a lot of veiling of myself, and is due to having lived too much alone before she found me and rescued me, will disappear in time under her treatment. That I will cast my veils and yashmaks aside and step out boldly with a perfectly nude face and when I catch people looking at me as much as to say that they have a notion that I am not looking or talking as they have a notion I ought to, that I will say to myself—meaning them to hear it, though inaudible: "What cheek to look at me like that! The idea of staring at me, as if I haven't a perfect right to have a notion of what sort of person I am myself and gratify my notion to say, do, whatever I've a notion to, or act whatever I've a notion to be—and if you don't like me as I am, well, you can jolly well lump it, and I am not going to alter one jot or tittle of myself or my notions to meet your stupid notions, and that's flat." And my eyes and face will harden to a hardness which is patently to be apprehended, and then the poor silly soul who had the impertinence to have notions as to how I ought to look, speak or act, because they've a notion I'm that sort of person, will get frightened and stay frightened, and next time we meet register to themselves no comments on my aspect, physical, moral, mental or otherwise, and nervously wonder whether they hadn't better thicken up their yashmak so that I shall not sift and settle them, or whether, better still, they hadn't better choose it to please me, if possible, instead.

This is the secret of life, thought I. To make, to *force* other people to wish to please you, instead of putting yourself to the trouble of trying to please them.

There is no need to record these introspective turnings and twistings. I was watching Celia and she was selling flags. I had arrived fourteen minutes too soon, and as I leant against one of the pillars of the colonnade of a certain classic-looking hotel in Piccadilly I had to think of something, and these are the things I thought about. I began by thinking about her and slipped off to thinking about myself. I admit the thoughts are not relevant to the matter of which I am about to write, but if I hadn't been leaning up against a pillar there waiting for her they wouldn't have passed through my mind, and therefore they are in a sense honorary members of the whole. I regret they are erratic and confused, if not entirely incomprehensible, but I had lately been reading a great many of the works of a very great and very incomprehensible author, and I had got into the habit of thinking and theorising in a very involved and incomprehensible way. In addition to this, the noise and bustle of Piccadilly on an afternoon in early summer render it a somewhat unsuitable place for the disentangling of subtle problems relating to human intercourse.

I believe I know nearly all the expressions that come and go in Celia's face, though there are dozens and dozens of them, and necessarily this must be so if a person thinks about as many different things as she does. But (how I dislike that word) whatever expression she has got on, there is always a young expression there too, so that when she is serious she looks young and serious, when she is cross she looks young and cross, when she is pleased she looks young and pleased, when she is mysterious she looks young and mysterious, and when she is tired she looks young and tired. The youth is always there and will always be there, though her teens are quite a way behind her now, she tells me.

Some day when she is old she will look young and old both together. But that is a long way off yet.

Watching her, I did not so much keep an eye on her face as on her movements. Why is it people don't

study grace of movement more and originality of movement and subtlety of movement? These are the things that pick people out of the common ruck, that set them apart from their fellows. Many people have beauty of colour or form or, as in the case of men, the beauty of physical strength, and are still of the herd. While some, otherwise insignificant, having the aforesaid, will dominate their fellows and stand out.

When, as in Celia's case, they are added to the other attributes, you can barely guess at the effect they produce. She's grace itself. If you saw her shadow follow her across the flags you'd know she was a pretty person.

Earlier in the day, very early indeed, I had deposited her there with her tray full of trinkets and flags, and thought as I helped her to descend from her car how nicely she was dressed. Pale grey—cockatoo-grey, I called it, for I'd seen it on a bird of that species, with pale flamingo wing feathers. I hope I don't notice what my women friends wear too much, but I know I like to be seen with someone who turns out daintily in preference to being seen about with someone who looks like a temperance reformer in low water. I always take a good look at Celia's things. Shakespeare said there were sermons in stones, and books in running brooks, and that there is something to be learnt from everything. Her dresses are an object lesson in sticking to the point. One of them would serve as a guide to a man in the conduct of his life. It begins at the neck (or wherever such things may begin) and goes down to the ground without misdirecting its energies or slipping off into side-issues. It starts as it were with a plot, abides by it and develops it and finishes it off properly at the hem, without changing its mind as to what it is going to do somewhere about the middle, forgetting what it's about, and coming to a bad and ineffectual end. In short, it is unlike this story, for it is simple, concise and organic. It has, like a well-told tale, a main incident and a relieving note. In the grey dress

this latter was supplied by a touch of embroidery and a sash with a big flat swinging tassel of what, as I am only a man, I will describe as quadrangle-green or even wet-pitch green. That is, it was a lawny-green, like old moist turf seen through an old grey college arch, for the dyers and dressmakers of the nineteenth century are poets and artists both. Whistler found this out long ago and used to slate our academicians, and say: "Go to the dressmaker, thou sluggard, for inspiration and lessons in the colours and the combinations thereof. Go to Worth and others of Paris for beautiful tone pictures and blending of exquisite hues." Celia, long before reading Whistler, viewed it in his way and spoke of her various dresses as bearing the signatures of different great artists.

The grey hat was wide and round, dipped to one side, and had an amazingly fine flickering fringe of cross aigrettes to it. Celia lowered her head, and looked through this at the passers-by and the flags went like wildfire. Her satellite plunged back and forth from headquarters, bringing more flags and yet more flags, and more tickets for an artist's proof of an engraving entitled *Love's Awakening* which was to be raffled for the fund. Celia displayed a small specimen photograph of this, framed in tricolour ribbon.

I lounged in the shelter of a column, restricting my movements to the space of shade it cast, not venturing out into the colonnade to feast my eyes on the treasures of art arranged tastefully in the colourman's window I could see. There is a row of shops privileged to lurk there, to occasionally tempt with wares, and at all times be spectators of the expensive world, French, American, Spanish, English, which passes through the hotel's temple-like portals. I had had a special command to arrive at four, escort Celia through that door and restore her with some pale liquid they would tell us was tea and charge for as though it were gold melted down and served in cups, but I had arrived too early, and this is a thing she will not allow. She says it is an

inadmissible form of unpunctuality, so I waited till the moment itself should arrive, in hiding. She would have been wroth with me to think I was a witness of her little manœuvres. I said just now that her hat was big and round and that she looked up at passers-by through the fringe. Yes. Well, a gallant naval officer—by the stripes on his cuff a commander—was hurrying along to keep an appointment with some girl—and as he was thickly covered with flags, by all rights of civilised warfare he ought to have been left to pass unmolested. Celia, perceiving when he was a full fifteen paces from her that it would take more than the usual pleading smile and tentatively extended flag to stop him, cut across straight in front of him, with her head lowered so that she couldn't see under her hat, and bumped full into him. They were both breathless for a moment, and she pretended (I know her when she is pretending, she can't deceive me) that she had no idea he was there. He was completely taken in, and when he looked at her became paralysed and forgot all about that girl who was waiting for him and seemed to take a fancy to the bit of pavement he was standing on and didn't make another attempt to move.

"I beg your pardon," said Celia. "I can't think how it was I never saw you." Her voice was cleverly disconcerted.

"My fault entirely," the now perfectly stationary Commander replied.

"But as you're here, please *do* buy a flag. Buy a flag, *please*."

It was ridiculous and barefaced. The fellow already looked like the admiral's flagship on a review day at Spithead.

He was quick on the uptake, like Hetty the hen. He swept her with his eyes and proposed that instead of buying from her he should buy something for her. Had she ever heard of a periscope? She had. If he bought her one would she promise to use it whenever she wore that big hat? No matter to what extent she

submerged in it, she could see where she went if she did. Celia's reply was no, and thanks. The form the hat took was all its importance and specially designed so. It was a "there's my husband hat," and owing to its curves, if that individual arrived inopportunely, the wearer submerged and was invisible till he had safely gone on his way.

This was not at all the sort of reply she ought to have made. The proper reply would have been a cold blank stare which would have sent him about his business feeling too uncomfortable to wait for the nine-and-sixpence change owing. However, he appeared to think his business lay right where he was. He must have been well-to-do, and extravagant as well, for he bought all her flags. He did this—I saw through the ruse—first, so that she would not be able to turn her attention to anyone else, and secondly, so that he could detain her in conversation as a reward for having been such a good customer. Her description of her hat and her reception of his rather poor joke about the periscope emboldened him to ask her if she had a husband, and she said "Oh no!" as if that was the last thing on earth with which she'd think of encumbering herself. He replied "*Splendid!*" in a deep rich voice that seemed to make the flag-stones vibrate. As if, having heard the coast was clear, he'd hang on like a limpet and enter the tournament lists for the guerdon of her smile and all that, and so on.

I looked anxiously at my watch. It still wanted seven and a half minutes to the time I was due to stroll up with the offer of my escort and tea. I daren't do so before these elapsed, and as to putting the blame on my watch for my being so soon, that wouldn't do, for it is a most high-priced, slim thing which Celia chose and gave to me herself, and it has an admonitory motto in it saying "Better late than always early." She gave it to me after a great argument we once had not so very long after I'd got to know her; about eighteen months or so maybe. In my anxiety to see her I'd come at a quarter

to eight instead of a quarter past, and she said this flurried her so much in her dressing that I must discontinue it. I dare not interrupt now. Seven and a half minutes. What couldn't happen in that time? I glanced at the gallant Commander. Yes. He wouldn't take long over anything he set out to do. He was now asking her to remind him of where they had met before, and Celia was replying cryptically that it was very curious that she couldn't remember where it was. She could remember lots of places where they hadn't met, and that narrowed it down. She never forgot people she met and even remembered people she hadn't met, sometimes, if they were nice. She only forgot people she didn't like.

Still five minutes to run. He might easily discover who she was and find that they had mutual friends and get permission to call, in five minutes. Especially with Celia, who is so dangerously quick in making friends. I peered at him again and didn't like his looks at all, for he was a deuced good-looking, well set-up fellow. He had good outlines and a quiet watching manner and a quiet watching half-smile. There was something in the way his cap was put on, carelessly, but with how much meaning. There again is one of those things one never hears spoken of, and yet I could sit down and write for days about the way that naval man put on his cap. If he ever became a visitor (and I hoped devoutly he would not), I would walk behind him and study it from behind. I would get alongside and study it from the side, and then I'd engage his attention and take it in full face too. It might take me weeks to think out and put into words what there was about that white-covered, glazed-peaked, gold-worked cap, taken in conjunction with that quiet face, not so much long as inclined to be roundish, and that quiet capable figure, standing there as if nothing mattered. Already I knew he would always stand quietly, as if nothing mattered, even if it mattered very much.

I suppose I am a peculiar individual, but when I see a thing such as the angle at which he set on that cap I want to sift it thoroughly. The thing it brought before one first, and which certainly was the main thing, whatever else may have lain behind it—and that there was a great deal I'm sure—was that it was an English thing, purely English. It was Trafalgar, and the Kentish knock, and St Vincent, and it said that however such a cap might behave when on shore leave, or wherever it might get to in shore towns, that that cap knew that England expected every man to do his duty, and not only that, knew that he would.

That cap worn so couldn't disguise the fact that it would take on four or five enemy cruisers or more even if it were only in charge of a destroyer and had nothing to back it up if attacked in return. That cap declared, as if it were the simplest and most everyday thing in the world, that death was an adventure, and a joke, even if a grim one, and that the only drawback to going up aloft suddenly in the course of a sea battle, having done the right thing, was that one couldn't risk one's life in another action the same afternoon.

Yes, the misleading, splendid, heart-breaking insouciance of the set of that cap would almost bring tears to the eyes of anyone who was enough of a poet to see deep into things.

I looked at my watch. The white-topped cap and the big grey hat were bent over the small reproduction of the picture to be raffled. entitled *Love's Awakening*. She was now writing his name on a ticket. She knew *his* name now.

I don't suppose I have a funny bone in my heart, but when I saw those two heads bent together I felt as if I had one and as if someone had jogged it badly.

At last it was four o'clock. From an old neighbouring church a mellow bell proclaimed it. Drawing on my yashmak, the one with rather a forced smile on it,

I sauntered up and said : " Hello, Celia. Not kept you waiting, I hope ? "

I don't think I'm vain, but an expression in the eyes of Celia's men friends as they look me gradually up and down tells me that even if I don't wear a white-topped cap I have a certain something about me.

" There you are, Peter. Just in time for me to introduce you to Commander Mommeter."

I looked at him as we shook hands. Could he be the cloud no bigger than a man's hand for which I was ever on the look-out ? But courage ! I'd had so many narrow escapes. Why meet trouble half-way ?

" Ah ! How de do ? " I said stiffly through my yashmak.

" Captain Mommeter is coming to tea to-day, Peter. Isn't it charming ? We haven't met for *so* long."

Oh, Celia !

I murmured something indistinctly and, thanks to my yashmak, they didn't see what I really thought. He murmured something politely conventional too.

" Yes, I was going to have it here, but now I am going home specially. There, isn't that a compliment ? " she smiled dazzlingly at him. " Don't get there till a quarter to five o'clock. I sha'n't be back before then. I've got heaps of things to do. I've promised to report at headquarters and get another collecting-box, for this is full. Mind you don't forget to come, and before you go you must let me pin a flag on you. But I'm sorry —I must remove the others. When I plant a flag somewhere, it must be the only one ! " She swept the others off and put one of hers on. " There, that's it ! " and she put her head on one side.

He looked down at the little flag with a curious expression on his face. I think he was really a little bit overcome, for after a moment all he could find to say was " Oh, swish ! "

" That's just it," said Celia, laughing at him. " Don't forget. Five o'clock."

" I shall be there. Thanks so much." He stepped

back and saluted. And again let me say I could write reams about that salute. As I said before, movements may mean so much or so little. Any big naval battle left out of the angle of the cap was included in the salute.

Something about the man impressed me, but I wasn't going to give it away to Celia.

"Who is that chap, anyway?"

"It's rather amusing. I know quite well who he is, but candidly, Peter, he doesn't a bit know who I am."

"Then you shouldn't ask him to tea, and certainly you shouldn't let him, even if you do know who he is, say 'swish' to a woman of your position like that. A man who'd say that to you after such a short acquaintance can't have any fine feelings."

I wasn't going to let on what I had found out from the cap.

"If he doesn't know me, how can he know what my position is? And what would be the use of having fine feelings on a flag day? They'd only get in the way. Everything is promiscuous and permissible. Let me tell you who he is. He's Diana's cousin, the one we've heard so much about; as soon as he gave me his name I recognised him from her description and from an old Chinese ring he is wearing. He got it when he was in Pekin as a middy during the Boxer Rising, and he had to fight five men for it. I've known the story for ages."

"I like the way you said you hadn't seen him for *so* long. What a fibber you are."

"That's strictly true. As I'd never seen him before, it wasn't an untruth to say I hadn't seen him for *so* long."

We were just about to trot off to headquarters when a smart young fellow in the uniform of a Guards' regiment swung up. Celia, who is an almighty huntress, authoritatively demanded that he should buy a flag (one of those she had swept off the Commander) and a ticket.

"Oh, right-o!" he said agreeably but hurriedly, fumbling in a pocket.

"Yes, a flag, certainly, and one ticket—or two—or six. Here's ten bob. Want my name? Lemme see, what is it? I've quite forgotten. I'm in such a hurry I can't remember it. Oh yes. Alastair Campbell, Guards' Club. D'you mind if I just take my bits and run along quick? Thanks—thanks."

He grabbed the tickets and rushed into the hotel, in his hurry scattering some on the pavement.

"How awful to have to put up with these off-hand boys. But I suppose as it's for charity it can't be helped." I picked up the tickets, as they looked so untidy blowing about. "Here, what am I to do with these? Shall I give them to the hall porter and tell him to hand them over as he comes out again?"

"Not at all. He doesn't want them. Why, you can tell by that boy's appearance that he hates pictures. He's quite a nice boy. I'll sell them again, so give them to me."

I was shocked at her want of commercial morality. "You can be put in prison for this sort of thing. I don't know what women are coming to. I always knew they were rather dishonest, but I never knew they were as bad as that, selling tickets twice over."

"I had instructions to make every penny I could for the charity, and I'm going to. I may sell these several times yet—as long as they hold together. He's forfeited his rights by letting them blow away. People who lose their tickets are a great nuisance, because if the thing is won by them and they don't claim it, no one knows what to do with it, and it has to be stored for months."

Just then two more subaltern Guardees hove in sight, armed with longish cigars, the remains of a late lunch, I should think. "Come on!" I pulled at her sleeve, foreseeing that she would tackle them too, but she shook me off.

"I must just get something out of these two," she said.

"Nonsense. You've got quite enough."

"But can't you see how awfully rich they look! Wait a sec. Flag! Won't you buy a flag? Or a ticket for this picture?"

They looked down at Celia's upturned face. Creamy-white, like the shadow you see in the calyx of a lily—with a touch of azalea-pink in her cheeks and lips. They were instantly rooted to the spot. The long cigars were politely removed.

"Good gracious me. Souls awakening. I'd rather not. I prefer to keep mine quiet. What's that? Love's awakening. Oh, that's another matter. I'll have five shillingsworth of that. Most decidedly. And this old sport here too. Ten shillings for him—— I don't think that's enough. He's very rich, quite rich. He's my eldest brother and has all the money. Stick him for a whole gold bit. Do. It will do him good. Yes, no nonsense. Out with it, you old Scotchman. It's like drawing blood from a stone——"

The elder brother was handing two or three notes to Celia quite amiably, so we could see how the description suited him. "Yes. He's a sort of miracle, you see. He's in a Scotch regiment and yet he's really Scotch. Some mistake, what? He ought to be in the Welsh Guards, of course. His name—address—naturally—to send the picture to when he wins it—Alastair Campbell—that's his name——"

"Alastair Campbell? I seem to know the name." Celia tapped her teeth with her pencil.

"Oh, rather. Best name in Scotland. Address—Guard's Club—Pall Mall. And if he wins it, I'll see that he has it framed and keeps it as a mascot. They will like it at the club, won't they? But no. I think it would be better to send it up home to the old family place. Kincudbright Castle—Perth, N.B., R.S.O. Don't put D.S.O. by mistake or B.E.F. or M.Y.O.B. or D.C.O.C., will you? *Do* be careful of that, won't you? There will be great excitement in the family mansion if he wins the picture. They've only got about five or

six hundred there already, and this *Love's Awakening* will come in awfully handy. It's a charming place. No, don't give him any change. It's bad for him. Put it in the box. That's it. Yes, it's a charming place. Ever heard of it? No. How absurd. Why, it's very well known, I assure you. What a lot of writing you have to do on these tickets. Yes, up at the old place they have two ghosts; yes, five hundred pictures and only two ghosts. Isn't it absurd? What a discrepancy. Yes, the poor things killed each other in a quarrel, and so they are not on speaking terms. They were brothers, but they quarrelled. My brother and I never quarrel. Never. And so these two poor things don't speak; they only bow coldly as they pass. That is, one bows but the other can't, as it carries its head under its arm——"

"Did you say you were Scotch?" said Celia, still writing tickets hard.

"Rather."

"I'm afraid I don't believe you—you've got a sense of humour and you spend money like water."

"What! You think because we haven't got cold feet we can't be Scotch. That's an obsolete superstition. A Scotchman may suffer from cold knees, but he——"

"I'll tell you what it is," said the elder brother, who hadn't spoken yet. "He'll spend my money like water but he won't spend his own. He's not spent a penny up to date. It's all mine, as you may have seen. He just goes on talking so as you won't notice it. Of course he's Scotch."

Campbell Number One had come out again, and was hailed as "There you are, you mouldy old perisher," and invited to have a ticket. He said he'd had some, but there were some fellows inside who hadn't, but who would have to. So he pushed his way in at the twirling glass door and brought out three more as like as peas to the others. They all had a pronounced look of each other, except the first one, who was taller, and they were

all in the same regiment. He elbowed the talkative one away and, drawing the others forward, said the only thing that would help them through the dreary wastes of life would be the hope of winning that picture of *Love's Awakening*.

Each of them gave his name in turn as Campbell; Graham and Charles and Edward. All Campbells; and they all came from Perth, they said.

"I heard you were coming, of course," said Celia, "but I didn't expect you to-day." She was rapidly becoming intimate with them. I was positive that in a few moments more they would be invited to tea, like the gallant Commander. She is absolutely incorrigible in her unconventionality; when I remonstrate with her she says that it doesn't matter, as London is simply a mass of densely clotted family life. If you don't actually know a person, you know the brother, the cousin, the aunt, or the mother, or you've been to their christening or they've been to yours. The talkative one, with whom a very little encouragement went a long way, was asking her if she didn't think flag days were very one-sided affairs. Though it was a matter of complete indifference to her, *she* knew their names and their Christian names and where they were to be found in town and their home address in North Britain, and yet, though they were longing to know her Christian name and what part of town she hallowed by her presence, there wasn't the slightest chance of getting to know it. Life was a blank.

She was dealing out the tickets, and they were all scrambling for them and contradicting each other as to which belonged to which, for no one of them seemed clear as to whether he were John, Alastair, Graham, Charles, Edward, or Malcolm, or who had paid or who hadn't. But one thing I noticed was that, Scotch or not Scotch, they had all paid several times over for each ticket.

A slight disturbance in the street at this moment called our attention to a tall, rather dishevelled-looking

girl, with her hat fallen to one side, carrying a flag-tray and walking quickly along, not on the pavement, but by the edge of the street, with a herd of small boys following her, and several people walking along the kerb, watching her as if they were not quite sure of what she was going to do next. She was talking in rather a high voice, with a slight lisp, and scolding the boys for following her, and yet she seemed to be encouraging them, rattling her box and saying what a lot of money she had collected. She was quite close to the hotel when, on looking down Piccadilly, I saw two policemen making straight for her at a sort of jog-trot. One of the small boys saw them too and shouted: "'Ere's the coppers. They're after you. Look out, missis."

The girl turned round, saw them, and made a flying leap for a disengaged taxi, which was crawling along, untenanted.

The driver pulled up, expostulated, and explained with animation that he had made arrangements to pick up a fare in ten minutes.

"No, no! You must drive me. Be a sport! Give you anything you like! You'll be there and back in less than that if you buck up and don't talk!"

"Where to, then?"

"Number —— Grosvenor Square!" She flourished her hand at him. The door banged and the taxi went off like a shot, the gears nearly ripping out of the gear-box.

Celia clutched my arm, which I had put out for her support.

"Did she say number —— Grosvenor Square?"

"Yes," said the Campbells all together. "She did."

"She did, most decidedly she did. It's very queer. I think we'd better nip into a taxi and get along there at once and see what's the meaning of it."

I hailed one, and after turning it drew up.

"That's the number of my house," cried Celia agitatedly.

"You don't mean to say so," said the Campbells, repeating it to get it right.

"Yes. She's not a real flag-seller. Her tray and box are not regulation at all. She's a society thief, that's what she is. And she's going to give my name as a blind and use my house as a means of escaping from justice! Come on! Hurry!"

"May we come too?" said the Campbells eagerly. "There may be a struggle. The policemen are asking the people over there—by the florist's—what address she gave!"

"Yes, yes, come along." She plunged into the taxi and I followed, and three Campbells got in helter-skelter, sitting on each other's knees, and trampling all over our feet. One stuck his head out of the window, calling on the others to follow, and was violently jerked over on to me as we started.

"Good Lord!" I groaned. "Flag-day manners. I'd no idea it was as bad as this." I glowered at the Campbells.

"Oh," said Celia, "they're only boys."

"Oh yes, we're only boys," they chorused, ragging and pinching each other and roaring with laughter. One was at least thirty, I'm sure.

"And why shouldn't they come if they want to? Besides, there may be a struggle. That woman is not sober, and to my mind she has all the look of a dangerous criminal."

"We'll be badly needed," said the Campbells, "but you can rely on us."

"I'm sure I can," Celia replied, with a wait-till-I-can-get-at-her expression on her face.

The taxi lurched off at a dangerous pace. As we went along Celia unwound herself from her tray. She had a feeling she'd like to have her hands free, she said. I suspected that she was itching to box the bogus flag-seller's ears. Any quantity of disgraceful things

went on, and money intended for the charities was stolen and they suffered grievously, and people were victimised to any extent. During a block in the traffic, we had to listen to a string of dark doings, and the Campbells subscribed eagerly to all she said; stirred her up more and more, and goaded her on.

Campbell Number One said he had heard of a thief like that who took refuge in a most respectable house, and when the police came after her she got up on to the roof and there was a fearfully exciting chase. She ran round and round for hours along the parapets of a series of connecting buildings and escaped by sliding down a gutter pipe. When taken she was found to be an escaped female convict who had once been an acrobat.

"If only Habits will have the good sense to refuse her admittance. He is getting so good now at knowing who he may or may not admit. He's really invaluable."

I opined optimistically, in spite of my squelched feet hurting me, that he would not let her in. Her looks were too rowdy altogether, and though he hadn't a photograph, she was so very like some of those already in the collection who were taboo.

I haven't mentioned it before, but Celia's house is besieged by bores. Everyone's house is, but especially Celia's, owing to her good nature. However, she knows what her feelings and shortcomings are in this matter, so she has specially trained her butler to refuse admittance to certain people. There is a rogue's picture gallery down in a room off the pantry of the people he must not admit, so unless they are strong bores and push past they can rarely get in. When we can't get a photograph of the bore we make drawings, and then we choose the best one, and up it goes in the big glazed cupboard and is stuck with drawing-pins on the green baize, with a description beside it of facial peculiarities or peculiarities of dress or manner.

Thus No. 10 is a Welsh doctor who never does any work. Calls at one-fifteen, stays to lunch, reads the

paper and has a snack if Celia is out; has tea. Has a good try to stay for dinner, and won't dress for it or even brush his hair, and makes everyone feel uncomfortable. Tells tall scientific stories, which if one looks up one finds to be figments of his imagination. If Celia wants to get rid of him she has to receive an imaginary call to the bed-side of a sick friend. If not got rid of, stays and consumes whisky and soda till two A.M. Very obnoxious. Marked two stars, and W.W.

W.W. means "won't wash"; the two stars mean an unusually virulent bore.

No. 25 is a decayed literary man, with Persian blood in his veins and Persian warts on his face. He was at one time correspondent on foreign politics to *The New York Hooter*. Fond of looking in on at-home days and spilling slices of bread and butter on Aubusson carpets and treading same well in. Spills tea and ices on new charmeuse gowns, talks incessantly on foreign politics, and gets his facts upside down. W.W. and D.D.

D.D. means "distinctly dotty."

No. 16. Mrs Z. Here we have an old lemon. Her face is a bright tomato colour and does not go with the drawing-room carpet. If you must admit her, show her into the billiard-room, as tomato goes with the colour of the carpet there.

No. 18. Captain L. Don't admit on musical at-home days as he makes curious booming noises (against time) when vocal or instrumental music is going on. Mrs Carmichael is nervous if left alone with him.

No. 7. Mrs M. Particularly boring busybody, only comes to pry into what goes on. Nothing particular in appearance, which is entirely mediocre. O.n.a.a. (on no account admit).

No. 18. Young enough to know better. Insane on statistics. Perpetually asking you to glance at sheets of sea-green paper with lines and figures on them in white, rather like temperature charts; proving that England's consumption of bicarbonate of soda,

or bananas, or nitrates was larger in 1909 than in 1911, and dwindled down to a quarter of the figure in 1912 because the Japanese came into the market.

Habits' position is no sinecure, I can tell you. But for all his years of training he had admitted the lady with the tousled hair into the drawing-room and she was already having her tea. She'd asked to have it served at once and made herself quite at home.

"But, Habits, how could you let her in! Didn't you see what a very funny person she is?"

"Yes, mum. But I've no photograph of the lady, and some of the very best people look so queer sometimes. I did think, though, she was funny, and very familiar with the taxi-driver. She laughed a whole lot with him and slapped him on the back before he drove away."

As we stood talking the second instalment of the Campbells landed up with a whoop in their taxi at the door, left open by Habits in his agitation. They were very noisy, but all exceedingly good-looking and well turned-out. They gave up their caps nicely, and smoothed back their hair, which already shone like polished wood, and trooped up the stairs at our heels.

We found the flag lady, tall and slim, helping herself to tea quite calmly, and, standing there, she received us with the teapot held up aloft, pouring skilfully into the cup held low down.

"She's putting a head on it. Barmaid!" I thought.

"Put that down!" said Celia indignantly.

"I will in a minute if you'll give me time. Sugar? —milk?—yes, thanks," addressing herself and suiting the action to the words. She didn't seem to resent our coming in or interrupting her in what she was doing. In fact she didn't let us interrupt her at all.

"Certainly. I've no objection. The policemen are after me, and I felt I stood a better chance of getting off lightly if I was caught in a respectable house in a respectable square." Her coolness was staggering.

"*Exactly* as I thought. *Exactly* as I thought. What

did I say ! ! " said Celia, turning round and appealing to the assembly. The Campbells, though by their looks they were awfully well-bred, and were in a tip-top regiment, seemed to be foolishly overcome by uncontrollable giggles. Certainly the girl was a sight, and enough to make anyone laugh, but it shows what an awful mistake it is to ask people to tea you don't know. These young bloods, having got in without proper introductions, thought they could do as they liked, naturally.

"I knew you were a society thief the moment I saw you. Yes, I knew it in the first instant, and I said so. But I have no words in which to express my disgust. Why don't you work ? "

"I simply hate work."

"But the idea of stooping to this. You make me blush for my sex. Such a despicable way of obtaining money."

"Oh, the money is all right ! Don't please worry about that." She drew up a chair to the tea-table.

"But I am worrying about it. I sha'n't let you out of this house till you give me every penny ! "

"I'll give you some of it for the charity, but I certainly won't give it all. I've worked frightfully hard collecting it."

"We'll see about that," said Celia, her face hardening surprisingly.

The flag lady shrugged her shoulders, stirred her tea noisily and took a large piece of cake. How amazing these hardened criminals are. Fancy being able to be hungry when you know the police are on your track for obtaining money under false pretences. What nerve. She was gulping down the tea, gobbling the cake.

We stared at one another, amazed at her coolness and her appetite.

Celia took off her hat with an unspellable sound, fiercely jabbed the hat-pins into it and threw it on a sofa ! She ran her fingers wildly through her hair until it stood up excitedly.

"This is a nice thing to have happen! What made you come here? Do you suppose I'm in the habit of allowing strange people in and out of my house without knowing anything about them?"

The Campbells looked guilty. I caught her eye and coughed derisively. I couldn't help it.

"No. I don't suppose you do." Another piece of cake was transferred to the plate. "Why should you? No. Quite so. There's another question I'd like to ask you and it's this: Instead of stooping to these vile methods, why don't you work? Even if you do hate it, that's no excuse."

"Ah! I only wish I could work. If you knew all my story——" The girl put down her tea and shook her head pathetically, and let her rouged cheek drop in her slim, nervous-looking hand for a moment.

"I don't wish to be harsh." Celia was touched by the attitude and sudden lapse from the hard defiant manner of a few moments before, and no doubt felt there might be extenuating circumstances. Her eyes rested on her, and in a trice I saw she had endowed her with a poor enfeebled old father, a confirmed invalid, broken down after years and years of unremitting toil, all his savings of a lifetime (which after his death were to keep the wolf from his children's door) inveigled from him by an unscrupulous friend who had persuaded him to invest them in a city swindle. There might really have been something to make one feel sorry for the girl, looking at her as she sat there, if one hadn't known that she was in all likelihood up to every dodge and bit of crook-craft possible.

Celia, unfortunately, with her susceptible heart, would only see the possibilities of pathos, and in another trice fitted her out too with an incapable, querulous, good-for-nothing mother who wandered about in an old dirty wrapper, her hair unkempt and perpetually in curl-papers, nagging at her daughter for not having found some means of paying the doctor's bills or for getting the expensive drugs and invalid foods which

he must have at all costs if they were to keep the feeble flicker of life going in his poor thin frame on which the skin was stretched like parchment.

"I don't wish to be harsh," she repeated in a voice which softened rapidly, "but you know that every penny of money you obtain wrongly and keep for your own purposes, whatever they may be, is money stolen—yes, stolen—from little orphans. It's dreadful to think of."

"I'm an orphan myself." The flag girl drooped still more.

Celia gave a clucking noise with her tongue and shook her head as if she didn't know what to say. She wiped out the mental picture she had made, swept the poor old sick father unceremoniously aside, and rapidly went to work upon another tableau. The girl had been left unprotected at a tender age, the eldest of a family of orphans, all dependent on her, all looking to her for the care which ought to have been lavished on them by the mother who was now dead. Perhaps in the mother's lifetime this girl had been her right hand, helping her with the housework, bathing and teaching the younger children, pinching and scraping to make the tiny sum of money the elder ones earned between them go round. At last she lost her situation, owing to something unforeseen, and no money came into the small establishment; driven by the cries of hunger of the smallest children, in despair she took to dishonest means to obtain money to buy bread! Celia was melting rapidly. In another few moments she would offer the unspeakable female the shelter of her roof indefinitely. That I'd never allow. I'd seen too many of her sort in the police courts, so I'd settle her myself if Celia didn't. She wouldn't fool me, and I'd see she didn't fool her either.

As she wavered the door opened and, more than true to his word, for it wasn't yet a quarter to five, in stepped the gallant Commander.

Celia glanced at him as if she'd quite forgotten who

he was or what he was doing there, and I think she wished the invitation had slipped his memory, as his coming was so inopportune.

The Campbells were grouped gracefully round the room and had ceased giggling. They looked self-conscious and uncomfortable, as though the girl's words had touched them.

As the Commander entered the room the flag-seller looked at him, gave a cry of pleasure, jumped up and came swiftly forward.

"Ah! here's someone who knows me and knows I'm honest. He'll vouch for me."

In the act of taking Celia's hand the Commander paused and looked at the speaker. Her appearance was not such as to excite admiration or even confidence. Her figure, true, was tall and slight, with a great freedom of movement about it which suggested the grace of the panther. She was across the room swiftly. But her hat, as I said, was awry and her clothes looked wisped and crumpled. There was too much cheap colour in her handsome face, put on in a sketchy way. One cheek glowed more than the other.

"Ah-ha! Birds of a feather," thought I. Cap or no cap, this man was not the sort of man for a lady's drawing-room, if he hob-nobbed with *her* sort. How right I was about not making promiscuous friends!

But he denied the allegation.

"I know you? I'm exceedingly sorry," he said stiffly, looking at her and from her to Celia and then at the other occupants of the room, "but I do not."

"Oh yes, you do. How can you say you don't?"

"But most certainly I do *not*."

"Oh yes, you do; you know me quite well." She advanced familiarly and seemed about to wind her long arms about him.

He warded her off.

"I beg your pardon, I repeat, I'm *sure* I do not know you." He looked at her hair and her cheeks and her

hat. His face, which was a reddish-tan, became a deeper tan. The quiet look became a shade quieter.

"You offered me a drink last night, so there!" (The other orphans, all the lot of them, vanished into thin air at the mention of her having promiscuous liquid refreshment offered to her by naval officers who refused to acknowledge her afterwards. All Celia's suspicions returned with a rush.)

"Really, madam, you must be crazy. I'd never seen you till this morning for a few minutes; and not only that, but may I say that I don't particularly wish to see you again, for I don't like your looks at all!"

"Well, at any rate you're frank!"

"I'm not Frank. I'm Arthur."

"Arthur who?"

"Arthur Mommeter. But why should I be catechised by you like this?"

The gallant Commander was losing his temper. It was hard lines to come along hoping to make an impression and to be greeted as an old friend by a bedraggled, tousled girl who looked as if she had been engaged in a free fight somewhere.

"Mrs Carmichael, excuse my asking you, but how did this—this person get here? She seems quite out of place." He looked round him at the beautiful rooms, white and grey and pale cherry colour.

"Oh, Captain Mommeter, don't you really know anything about her?"

"I've never seen her till this morning. I was in the city and I happened to pass up Lombard Street and saw she had a perfect mob round her and everyone was guying her. It was all her own fault, for she was answering them back. The police were moving her along for obstructing the traffic."

We were all at the height of annoyance and constrained intercourse when Habits the imperturbable appeared in full pomp, preparatory to circulating among visitors cups of tea on a large salver, followed by his satellites with the milk, lemon and sugar. If

the last trump sounded within a few minutes of tea-time, Habits would serve it and, having done so, proceed to place himself in the hands of the heavenly hosts. After probably offering them tea too.

The Campbells partook of it in a silence which somehow struck me as explosive. The flag lady was in Habits' direct line of progression, and true to his training, whoever or whatever she was, as she was in his drawing-room (he looked on it as his, I know), she should be offered tea. Notwithstanding, too, that he had already served her before with it. His pompous worthy passage stopped all recriminations for the moment. The sight of tea and Habits' sublime example and her natural (or unnatural, and, as I considered, unduly and dangerously developed) instincts of hospitality made Celia feel that till tea had been partaken of further explanations must be deferred. There is in this simple ritual of the tea-table and other everyday incidents of our home life more than one thinks. Many a tragedy has been averted because it was time to sit down to a meal. Many a matter of life and death has been pushed aside by the ordered but irresistible march of little things. Many a poor soul must have been put off committing suicide because it was near dinner-time or because the servants might think it funny; or postponed, after the undecided, shilly-shallying way of Hamlet, the murder of an aggravating step-father because it would cause so much extra housework to clean up the debris.

So Habits served us solemnly and carefully one by one, and passed relay after relay of cake to the slightly flustered-looking Campbells.

When this duty had been satisfactorily discharged he caused the cigarettes to be handed round, solemnly and punctiliously, offering the spirit-lighter to each of us in turn himself—because he won't trust his satellites with the delicate task of holding the flame correctly to the end of the cigar or cigarette of a perfect lady or gentleman—and in due course he came to the flag girl.

But she quickly took the light out of his hand, lit her cigarette herself, remarking casually, when he protested politely: "'Sno trouble, thanks."

"'Sno trouble, thanks." Where had she got that expression? It was one of our own special japes, feeble, but in almost constant use. Whenever anyone did anything for anybody and was politely thanked for doing so, they replied equally politely "'Sno trouble, thanks."

I looked at the lady again. I ran my eye up and down her figure. Her feet were large though well formed. She was exceptionally tall. "'Sno trouble, thanks," indeed! It was Dan, of course. Why hadn't I seen it was he before? No one else had noticed it evidently, for everyone else still looked uncomfortable and awkward. What was that fellow up to now, I'd like to know. Good thing for him he hadn't got his commission yet. He could have been court-martialled if he had masquerading in the streets in this get-up. I'll say this for it, that it would have been excellent if he had got the rouge on a bit more evenly and if it hadn't been such a shocking colour. His management of his voice was exceptional, and besides it was all in his favour, as it was never a deep voice. He sang in a high baritone, almost a tenor, and his speaking voice was slow and languid; not throaty, but always pleasantly misty, with almost a lisp on some words. Celia hadn't spotted him in the least, which was funny. I think she was rather muddled and overtired with her busy day, having started out early and having, too, been very late the night before.

A shrill whistle on the speaking-tube brought Habits out to it. I heard him reply, put back the plug with a click and descend the stairs quite quickly. Though he has all the slow, splendid pomposity of the ideal butler, he moves with incredible swiftness at times.

He was soon up again, and ushered in a group of genuine flag-sellers from neighbouring beats, exhausted from their efforts. They fell gratefully on to chairs

and sofas. One was fully as tall as Dan, and looked more muscular, though she was the real thing. Extraordinary how brawny the modern girl can be, I thought.

They all called loudly for tea (oblivious of what they had come in for, and of the tension of the atmosphere), but Habits was in earnest conversation on the landing with two large policemen who had posted themselves one outside each door. I slipped out.

"Are you after the bogus flag-seller?" I jerked my head towards the drawing-room.

"Yes, sir; and a nice chase we've 'ad. She's given us the slip over and over again to-day. We've got a warrant for her arrest. She's not an authorised flag-seller at all and she's taken a lot of money We've got a full description of the proper tray and collecting-box, and hers is all wrong. But it's odd she should belong to this 'ouse. I see me old friend 'Abits 'ere in charge, and I understood he was in a situation in a most respectable 'ouse. Quite a surprige to me it was when she gave me this as her address this morning."

"There's nothing the matter with the house, Officer, but there's everything the matter with that lady. In fact, she's not a lady at all. She's a male criminal, and a very notorious one too."

"My word, Sir, you don't say! I'd better get the bracelets on at that rate. We've got them with us. Can you give me some definite information?"

"I can indeed, and by a most extraordinary coincidence. I'm a lawyer, and I defended him on a most serious charge of a double murder and arson combined. I got him off, but I always felt I oughtn't to have done so. You can guess what my feelings were when I saw him here!"

"That I can, Sir. Then there's no time to be lost. Is he strong, Sir?"

"Like a horse. You'll have a frightful struggle. Have you got the things you were speaking of ready for use?"

"Under me 'and, Sir."

"There are several able-bodied men here, but I have reason to believe they are his particular pals and work in collusion with him. We don't know any of them at all—never as much as *seen* any of them before. They've palmed themselves off on Mrs Carmichael, who is very easily taken in; forced their way in when she doesn't even know their names."

"Some of the swell mob, Sir. I know. But I'm up to their little dodges."

One, two, One, two. They entered the room, with myself in the rear, swept its occupants with their eagle eyes and went over to the flag-seller, who was still expostulating and trying to make her case clear to Celia and Captain Mommeter.

"Well, Inspector, we've met before," she said, eyeing the larger one quite calmly as he approached her.

"Yes. I've got a note of it 'ere"—he produced a cheap shiny pocket-book meaningly. "But before you leave here, Madam, I shall be glad if you will give me your real name and address. I've got you down here as Ellaline Fitzherbert, and you gave the address of this 'ouse as being the address of your 'ome."

Celia clutched me. "Ah, what did I say! What did I say!"

"I didn't mean to say it was my real home. I only meant it was my home in a sense."

"I asked you in my official capacity as one of the Inspectors in his Majesty's Metropolitan Police Force a plain question. I asked you what your 'ome address was, and it was your dooty to give it to me correctly, and no prevaricatings."

"And so I did. This is my home. It's my spiritual home."

"The woman's mad," breathed Celia, "just mad."

"Yes, indeed it is. I've been sustained and borne up here many and many a time by elevating and ennobling conversation. I've dropped in here at odd moments when all my faith in mankind seemed about

to crumble to pieces, and left the house full of hope and confidence."

The Campbells were squeaking like guinea-pigs. I wondered why they couldn't control their mirth, and wondered whether they had twigged something or other of what was going on.

"Believe me or not as you like, but it was in this house that I first felt yearnings towards leading a better life."

"I've 'eard all that before. It's very fine, but you don't seem to be leading much of a life for all these yere yearnings, leastways to my way of thinking, obtaining money under false pretences and carrying on in these ways, like you've been doing to-day."

"Ah, there's where you wrong me! I'm speaking the truth. I came here years and years ago, a selfish, heartless, thoughtless young fell—girl——"

"I know all about that. I'm well aware also of the fact that you are a female impersonator and you know that's a penal offence."

With an eye to effect, and to unnerve the creature, he quickly plucked off the big muslin hat, curls and chignon complete. There stood Dan revealed.

A shout of laughter came from the Campbells. They rolled about and shook helplessly, and laid their heads on each other's shoulders and seemed almost to weep. It was certainly amusing enough that Dan should dress up, but their mirth seemed uncontrollable and out of proportion to the incident. His appearance as a man finally cooked his goose in the eyes of the policemen. With a concerted movement they slipped alongside close to him. There was a quick dive, a click and the bracelets were on.

The ladies in the room shrieked.

"What on earth have you been doing?" Celia looked utterly dazed.

"I don't quite know," he said, looking down at his hands in rather a bewildered way, but in an instant his face cleared, as if what had happened were of no import-

ance. "Kergariou, you festive billy-goat, I've got you cold over that bet. I'm sure I've got the amount. There's the money-box under the sofa. Rip it open and count it."

The Campbells all together made a swoop for the sofa. Two legitimate flag-sellers were sitting on it, and with a perfunctory "Sorry to trouble you" they thrust them aside and got the collecting box out from underneath it.

"I insist on knowing the meaning of all this. I won't have my house turned into a bear garden——"

"Oh, excuse me, Mrs Carmichael," one of them said in the most well-bred agreeable tones possible, and paying no more attention to the policemen than if they hadn't been there. "Can I have the loan of a poker or something to wrench this box open?" He made towards the fireplace.

"I'm certainly not going to have my best drawing-room poker used to wrench that miserable box open. You must find some other means." She swept the Campbells with an angry and a haughty glance, but they seemed too agitated and too deeply interested in something else to notice it or allow her frostiness of manner to chill them.

"Don't bother, Kergariou. I've something that will do as well. No need to spoil the poker at all."

The Campbell who told ghost stories got out a perfectly good and perfectly large knife, with a perfectly good and exceptionally large steel pipe-cleaner, and fell to work on the box.

"You'll find it just about right; I never thought I'd do it, but I did. This flag-selling's not half a lark, I can tell you. Why anyone should ever trouble to do an honest day's work when money's so easy come by, I can't think. Whoo-ee! I've won three ponies, Celia! Seventy-five quid!! This old under the odds here bet me last night that—— By the way, I haven't introduced any of this crowd, have I? And now that I come to think of it, what are they doing here? I'm

awfully glad to see them as it saves me the trouble of going down to the Albany, but how did they get here ? "

" I don't know," said Celia feebly ; " at least, I mean I know nothing at all about them except that they say they're all called Campbell."

The policemen and I exchanged meaning glances.

" All called Campbell ? They're nothing of the sort. There are only two Campbells. Step forth, Malcolm and Alastair of that ilk, and let me introduce you."

Dan waved his handcuffed arms in their direction.

The policemen were both making notes for dear life in the glossy black-covered notebooks. What an enormous stationery bill his Majesty's Metropolitan Police must have.

The two genuine Campbells came forward a little sheepishly and said " How do you do ? " and apologised for their frivolous behaviour ; and then Dan introduced the first one we had met, and who apparently was the one with whom he had the bet, as Mr Kergariou.

" Kergariou ? I thought you said your name was Campbell ? "

He was also a bit sheepish, but anxious to explain things very fully. " I can't say how sorry I am, but I know you'll understand what the position was and forgive me if I tell you about it. I was just plunging into the Ritz to ring up about this bet, and find out about how much had been made up to four o'clock, when you asked me to buy a ticket. You see, I bet him he wouldn't dress up in these things and pretend to be a flag-seller and take fifteen pounds by half-past four. I was in a great hurry, because Dan said he'd be in a certain place at four and not a second later. I could ring him up then and he would give me an idea of how he had done up to date, and it made it so much more exciting, besides which these others "—he waved his hand towards the rest of the Campbells—" had some subsidiary bets between them as to the sum of the takings up to that time."

"But that is no reason for not having given me your proper name."

"Yes, it was. Most decidedly it was. I was in a fearful hurry. Dan could only spare a few moments; you know I told you that, and everyone can spell Campbell, though it takes them hours to get Kergariou right. It's an old Breton name, and my father's people came over with the Conqueror."

"No swank, Kergariou."

"Don't interrupt, De Courcy. Let me explain to Mrs Carmichael. I therefore gave, as I say, the first easy name that came into my head, and as I had just finished lunching with Alastair Campbell and his brother, who are both in my regiment, I gave his name. That's all."

"I believe this is all trumped up, Officer, don't you?" I murmured aside.

"It do look uncommon fishy."

"But what about the others?" Celia was asking.

"It was a silly joke, and in very bad taste, I'm afraid. When I'd finished telephoning and strolled out and saw that Campbell had given the same name as I'd given—naturally—as it *is* his name—I thought it would be rather a rag to bring up my other pals and pass them along as Campbells too. I apologise and grovel. It was very bad form, but I'm afraid I'm rather a silly juggins. But they are quite respectable; in fact two of them are your late husband's cousins, I've reason to think."

The cousins stopped carving at the collecting-box and shook hands very nicely, and in turn introduced the third man, who was their cousin, and who therefore claimed kinship to the house of Carmichael.

The box by now was open and the money poured out on the table. Everyone pressed forward to see the result. There were quantities of pennies, so that it took rather a time to count. One or two small coins rolled on to the floor, but finally, after getting them back, the

sum total was found to be fourteen pounds, two shillings and fivepence.

"Done brown, old chap," Kergariou said eagerly, going over the piles of money for the third time; "you are seventeen and sevenpence short."

Dan's face fell. "I could have sworn I had it all right. Wait a minute, though. What am I thinking of? I've got a pound note in my pocket. Blow it all! I can't get at it with these beastly bracelets on." He struggled to get at a pocket in his blue serge nether garments, which we now saw he was wearing, well rolled up, underneath the muslins of his skirts. "Here, someone lend a hand!"

Someone did, and succeeded in extricating a crumpled pound note.

"That leaves me two shillings and fivepence to the good, and I've won my bet."

"You did very well in that last few minutes." Kergariou puckered his brow thoughtfully. "When I rang you up you were still two pounds short, and you only had to walk up St James' and you got into a taxi outside Salmonsons' the florists in Piccadilly. It was sharp work to take two pounds in that time. Are you *sure* that pound note is not your own private property?"

"Rather not. I had exactly three pounds on me when I started. Malcolm and Bunty can prove that, for they dressed me, and I can account for those, as I'll tell you presently. I looked in at Noodles for half-a-sec. and jollied the hall porter a bit and he gave me a perfectly good pound without turning a hair. He's a warm fellow, I can tell you; probably a multi-millionaire. But that still left me a pound short. But I got it out of the taxi-driver. He was no end of a good chap; I sold him all my flags, and he gave me a pound for the lot and took them home to his kids."

"Thinking he was giving it to the charity, poor fellow."

Celia's voice was trembling with indignation. "If I had his number I'd send it back to him at once. These people can ill afford such sums, and it would be a great shock to him to know that the money he had parted with so generously was only to go to make up a sum that people were *betting* on."

"You needn't worry about the taxi-man. He did well. I paid him three perfectly good pounds to bring me here swiftly, and I told him what was doing, and he was all for it."

"I don't think we can count that in then—the sale was prearranged between you, and the money was not taken in the ordinary way." Kergariou danced round the table in his excitement.

"It's perfectly legitimate," said the Commander, his arm on Dan's shoulder as they leant over the table where the money lay in stacks. He had greeted him as an old friend as soon as ever he saw who he was.

"Why can't you count it in, I'd like to know?" Dan's eyes were blazing as he leant forward. "Nothing was said as to how or where I got it, as long as I got it. The taxi-man will tell you, on oath, that I gave him my own three pounds. I've got his number—one, two, three, oh!—it's an easy one to remember, luckily."

Opinions were divided. There was quite a hubbub.

"Objection, objection!—No! No! Let it stand! There's nothing in it!—Oh, isn't there?—I beg your pardon!—Listen to what I say!—If you'll only shut up a minute!—You're disqualified!—No, you're not—it's all right!—No, it's not!—He was quite within his rights! —The cone has gone up—it's coming down again—let it go at that——"

The Campbells roared out these remarks and howled each other down with voices which had had an edge put on them by yelling in foursome and eightsome reels at Highland gatherings.

"It's perfectly fair. Quite legitimate. I appeal to you, Inspector, as an administrator of the law, what do you say?" Dan turned to him excitedly.

"I've got nothing to say about it. All I have to say is that you're my prisoner, and you must come along with me now. Step lively."

"Officer!" gasped Celia. "Your prisoner!"

"Yes."

"But upon what charge, upon what charge?"

"Ah, that's just what I don't quite know myself! I don't at all like the look of this 'ere dressing-up, and obtaining money under false pretences, and all this giving of wrong names. And, moreover, I have it from this gentleman here, who is a lawyer and knows all about it, that this man is a dangerous criminal, who was very nearly convicted of a double murder and arson. He says he got him off, but 'e's positive that he was guilty——"

I took one look round the room and fled, without waiting to put on my yashmak.

It was the only way.

THE JUDSONS' BABY

EVERYTHING comes to London, even the spring, and though one treads along hard pavements instead of on springing grass, and smells warm wood pavement topped by fresh tar instead of wet warm cowslips on a green bank or a flash of lilac scent swung off a nodding head of bloom, one perceives it nevertheless.

Not merely by the great twitterment that assails one's ear as one goes by, issuing from a handful of bare brown twigs, dotted with minute green points; an apology for a bush situate behind a row of peeling railings and in which some socially too sophisticated sparrows are building for their next sooty idyll. But by a sort of something there is abroad or within oneself—that informs one of it, and rises up too, insinuatingly and tantalisingly from Mother Earth, clamped down as she may be in the city under slabs of stone or squares of wood. One's pulses beat more fully. And even in the town with the spring comes a sweetening of every colour the eyes rest upon, whether in the skies or people's faces or the shop windows or the clerks' ties or the typewriters' blouses and stockings as they hurry to their business; it is almost visible in the minor-keyed tints of the conveyances and public buildings. The sun, most mysterious of operators and full of high powers (I am a sun-worshipper, I assure you), resting on old bricks, dull and drab, gets a glister out of their dead surfaces and picks out and points with light any protuberances or glossy bits on anything going by or standing still. The spring sun leaves nothing untouched in the town any more than it does in the country.

The very buses seem to pair off like big ungainly

birds and come bouncing down the middle of the road side by side, while the drivers exchange greetings and congratulations on the weather and the lengthening of the days. Old brown houses in old brown squares "go gay" and wear a look as much as to say that there's no knowing what they might not do in these days, if provocation came their way. Can it be that the sap rises in houses? They look as if it did. They come out in window-boxes full of flowers—and in fresh colours—get done up, as the saying is.

The painters come and dab fresh paint on hall doors or other places; bits are scraped and washed or door-knobs are relacquered. Windows are opened and muslin curtains flutter out waggishly and trim maid-servants come and pull them in again and pause to look out, with an eye to chance passers-by or to exchange a sally with the painters in their white suits. As I passed the door of No. 13 a dark violet baby came out in a dark blue perambulator in charge of a dark blue nurse. The baby gurgled and waved a day-day to me, and the nurse gave her bonnet a little toss in my direction, for we quite often exchanged remarks and passed one another the time o' day, and about once a week I'd say: "How that child does grow, to be sure."

My thoughts were pleasant as I went along. This is the true beginning of the year, I said, the world is full of freshness and intention. Nothing has staled and there's an edge to all enjoyment. It is not a cold, drear January's eve we should choose as a point of departure. It is now, for one is spurred on to new enterprises, and even as the houses and the woods renovate themselves and make special efforts, so too do all people of temperament become enlivened and purposeful at such moments. Claiming to be one of their band, I was off, out, and bent upon an errand which I had postponed so often that really it seemed doubtful if it would ever be done. But the quality of the atmosphere was such that day that it pulled me out full of energy, so that I set my hat on

with a smack and a clap and went off about it at long last; and this piece of energy begot others (this happens, you know), and I consulted a list which I held in my hand of other much-delayed errands, and, mastering the contents, crumpled it up and slyly threw it down an area. I am in doubt about the sap and the houses, but I am sure about the surge of purposefulness in man at this time of year, and I believe that a lot of the paper one sees scurrying about the streets when the spring breezes start to blow are the lists of things people are going to do at once which they should have done years ago.

It is not on New Year's eve and not on New Year's day that one makes good resolutions. One is too cold. The time is now, when the sun smacks you on the back midway between the shoulders and warms the marrow in your spinal column up and all the little nerves that connect there begin to tingle and carry reply-paid messages to your members.

As I dallied along I heard a *frou-frou* of garments and was passed and outpaced in my leisurely stride.

I always walk slowly in fine weather. It gives me time to absorb it into my innermost recesses. And from behind I noted what an attractive personage carried the garments along. That describes it. She carried her garments along swiftly, floatingly. She walked there ahead of me with a blithe staccato walk, a double spring to each movement of the instep and ankle, a dancing step of a walk, and vanished round the corner. I followed slowly, and as I turned it, found her again, in conversation with a friend with a pug-dog. They were both talking at the top of their voices, and her voice, as I listened, matched the blithe go of her feet, for as she laughed and talked gaily I heard the high sweet jangle of youth's folly bells in it coming after me as I passed.

This was as it should be, I thought indulgently. I often feel indulgent in the spring. It was in perfect keeping that I should do so, for the sky was a hilarious

blue. Young clouds bloomed in it. I say bloomed advisedly, for they were soft and beautiful as flowers, and tinted as charmingly.

Now the thing which has forced itself more on my observation in the course of a life of a certain length is that in life everything happens suddenly. One takes big steps in physical growth suddenly, and ditto mentally. One is happy suddenly or miserable suddenly. One gets well or ill suddenly. One learns things suddenly, one marries suddenly, and so through the gamut of all the occurrences, ills and joys to which the flesh is heir.

And buried in thought about such things, I suddenly ran into somebody, a great strapping fellow.

"Hello! Why don't you—— Oh, hello! Is that you, Blenerhassett?"

"Hello!" I said.

"How are you?"

"Oh very well, thank you."

I leant my two hands on my stick and hunched my shoulders up to my ears and looked at him, blinking and calling back my wandering attention.

"I say, you know. You don't seem to remember me. Why, I'm——"

"Wait. No—yes—wait a minute. It's very rude of me, I know, but don't tell me. Why, God bless my soul, you are the Judsons' baby!"

"Yes, that's it. I am, or rather I was. Can't say there's much of the baby about me now!" and he laughed, just a bit conceitedly, I thought, pulling at his short moustaches. "I'm twenty-three, you know. I've done a year in India—had lots of polo and that sort of thing. Just got home now for a bit of leave and it's nice to see all the old faces and so on, though things seem a bit stagnant here after being out there."

"Well, well. How very remarkable. I wonder what your mother thinks of it all. Aren't you a bit of a surprise to her."

"Surprise! No. Why should I be? My brother,

who is a year younger, is taller than I am and my sister has just put her hair up."

"Well all I can say is *you* are a revelation to *me*. Dear me. Dear me."

I checked myself when I caught myself saying this. I've noted it in other men and can't stand it. And "You don't mean to say so?" That's a foolish expression and one I greatly dislike.

"Well, I suppose I must be in a way. I remember you quite well coming to our house and giving me sweets. I thought you a very decent sort of fellow myself——"

"Thanks, thanks."

"Oh, don't mention it. Ha! Ha! It does seem a bit odd when you come to think of it. Here I am now, I'm six foot one in my socks. That makes me, I should think, a bit taller than you are, doesn't it?"

"Yes. I'm just a bare shade over six foot. About half-an-inch."

"Oh, well, that probably means that you were my height when you were young. At your time of life I shouldn't be surprised if the old-age shrinkage had set in."

My time of life—when I was young—shrinkage! Did something, a thick veil of smoke or a cloud, come over the sun for a moment and make things seem dark?

"Oh. Ha! Ha! I see what you mean. Ha! Ha! Yes. Yes. I dare say that's so. Quite likely, I expect." I drew myself up square to him.

There was nothing to speak of in the matter of height between us, for all he might say to the contrary.

"And," hurriedly, to get away from a topic that I felt disinclined to dwell on, "are you having a good time? Painting the old town red!"

He jerked his head sideways with a lordly smile and a half-swing of his big shoulders. "You bet. Top-hole. Rather. No place like the little village. You can take it from me."

He looked as if he'd like to, and if I'd give him half a chance, unburden himself of a screed of lurid tales of conquest and callow theorisings about "life" or the "fair sex" or anything else that passed through his mind, but evidently paused and thought better of it, as time was too short, and there were other things to do. "Ever been in India?" he asked carelessly.

"Afraid not. Often wanted to go, but"—I shrugged my shoulders and spread a hand wide—"circumstances over which—— You know the rest."

"Ah, yes, yes. But you should have been in the service, you know, really. You'd have looked splendid in your trappings, you've got such a top-hole figure. I know you're a lawyer, and that's very nice and all that, but it's an awfully hippy business. Couldn't stick it myself. I often thought when I was up at Coorg last what an awful thing it would have been if my pater had made me go in for the law or something equally stuffy. Pooh! I'd hate all that indoor business. Why, you'd not look nearly as old as you do if you were out there, pig-sticking and going out on elephants after tiger. Look at our Colonel. He's no chicken, I can tell you; he must be quite your age, somewhere around forty, but he looks awfully fit considering and manages to keep up wonderfully with us chaps. It's the life out there, so healthy. All in the open air."

"I'm sure you've made a wise choice."

"You bet I have. I haven't any doubts on *that* score. I don't know if you know that I am with the British Resident at Lysore. It's a native state and there's no Rajah. The last one was sacked over fifty years ago, so Mr Coutts is a sort of king out there. You can imagine I manage to knock out no end of a good time for myself. Look here"—he put his hand on my shoulder magnanimously (I won't say patronisingly, for that wouldn't quite describe it. Tolerantly would be more like it)—"look here, next cold weather you must take a holiday from your dusty old law books and run

out and pay us a visit. Mr Coutts would be delighted, and our chaps would give you no end of a good time. Why, they'd make you feel young again ! "

Young again !

I really couldn't stand the fellow for all his effusive offers of hospitality. He only wanted to show off. I dare say I was rather bitter. Whoever would have thought he would grow up into this sort of howling jackass ? He used to be quite a nice little baby once. I shuddered at the thought of all the horseplay I'd been obliged to take a hand in. Oh, lor' !

" Awfully good of you, Judson, old chap. I'll think it over." (I'd do nothing of the kind.)

"Yes, do. That's a bet and don't forget it." He was aggressively hearty about it. " By the way, is that Miss Bellamy ? " He glanced down the street with affected unconcern to where the lady of the floating garments and thrilling voice and thrilling walk that matched it stood conversing with her friend. " There's a high-stepper for you. Awfully good-looking gel."

I followed his eyes, and why make any bones about it ? Her eyes were turned in our direction, but the gaze of that delightful young woman was not for me, but for the Judsons' baby. No wonder. He was a splendid specimen. Those two would make a fine couple.

My conversation dried up. I felt I wasn't wanted any more. His eyes were fastened on her. His thoughts had all gone over to where she stood. I dismissed myself with a noisy cheerfulness I did not feel and made a vague promise, to which he paid very little attention, to come round and see his mother and talk to him and discuss his invitation to come out for next cold weather.

I took one half-glance back as I made the crossing. She had shaken hands and parted with the friend and the pug and greeted Judson as he came her way. They spoke a few words and then turned off together.

As I turned in the opposite direction I repeated his words to myself. Something or other would " make

me feel young again," and "the shrinkage of old age had set in."

I felt as if out of the blue sky a thunderbolt had fallen. I left my rooms a young man, and I had suddenly become an old one. I saw myself as I really was, reflected in the mirror that the Judsons' baby had held up to me. According to that mirror, I was an old fogy to be fraternised with for the sake of old times. To be buttonholed and regaled with tales of youth and high adventure, in which I was far too old to participate except by hearsay. To be gently cheered up as I slowly ambled towards my latter end by hearing them recounting of their doings and adventures, keeping myself going at second hand out of the residue of the hot-blooded enterprise and joviality of strong young manhood which surrounded me on all sides.

Aye, on all sides. It was not only the Judsons' baby who had grown up, but dozens and dozens, hundreds and hundreds, thousands, millions of babies. And I was left to face them alone—because I did not just then formulate to myself that I was not the only person in this boat that had been suddenly launched; a boat built up like a coral reef by the slow passage of time—seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years, decades. Later I was to remember my contemporaries and examine them and their ways and speech and ideas with painful curiosity. As also I was to examine various repetitions of the Judson affair when I came across them.

But the whole thing was absurd. He said I was old, but I wasn't old! I didn't feel old. Why, I had hardly shaken off my boyish dreams yet. My childhood was still there within reach of my hand if I only stretched it out. Even now, when I heard the big boughs of a tall tree creaking above my head, or the rooks cawing in their throats, still I say I became once more a little tiny lad playing in the great gardens at home among my little playmate brothers of various insignificant ages. And still when the wind roared at night at the equinox, and shook the house and drove

the rain against the panes while I lay there in the dark, I was a pirate of the Spanish main ; adrift in the raging seas and about to be cast before morn on an island with palm-trees and cannibalistic black men who later would make me their king.

And still when I was ill or fretted (and though I may be laughed at for admitting it, I'll say it) I sometimes felt the loss of a kind mother's hand I had once known that straightened crumpled bed-clothes or pushed hair lightly off a hot forehead, a someone stooping and coolly perfumed who listened to my tale of what had gone wrong in my world.

I couldn't be so very old after all, then.

The book that I took down more often than any other was *Robinson Crusoe*. There was a story if you like. It was our favourite game as children in the big bare playroom. We'd turn a table upside down and fill it with our luggage (old rubbish, seats of chairs, the maid's work-boxes, my mother's band-boxes, anything at all) and shut the shutters and sail about for days, while we luffed and we tacked, with Man overboard ! and we've sprung a leak, and sighted the coast and called Land ahoy ! and Let the anchor go ! Tropical storms burst over us, and one of the children worked the shutters and banged them open and shut for lightning, while another one of the numerous family spun the big tea-tray and got peals of rattling thunder from it. Day by day the schoolroom tea came up upon a tray that got more and more battered for its booming.

I remember that I once fell off the table ship and nearly fainted at the horror of my position out in the black raging sea, and my favourite sister screamed so loudly because she thought the sharks had got me and shook so frightfully at the thought of it that the game had to be put off to another afternoon.

Ballantyne's books ran *Robinson Crusoe* close, and I saw myself in turn as a pirate and then as an exciseman shooting down the smugglers of rum or spirits

in casks and anything else contraband, or the captain of a brig that went out to sea, painted a different colour every time, to do queer errands. His books helped me greatly in the choice of a career; for of course this lawyering business was only for the time being. Soon, when the right and suitable moment presented itself, I'd get up, roll a few things up together, including a good knife and a six-shooter, and I'd set forth on my adventures and carve out that thrilling and successful destiny that awaited me. Then hey for the seas and the rugged mountains and the rolling plain!

But wait! Horrid thought. Had I forgotten? The time had passed for that. I might have had a career, but it was now too late, and now there was someone calling out peremptorily: "Pass along there, please, pass along there. Make way, please. What's that? Want to book a ticket to the Bahamas via Puerto Rico, Haiti and the lesser Antilles, and on to the Himalayas and Tibet or Turkestan? You're too late. Make way, please. Can't have any crowding here. Pass along, please. Pass along." Whoever he was, he was right. There, close on my heels, following on, and following on, were dozens and dozens of eager boys like myself—that is, like myself as I *once* had been—anxious to embark and go forth to see the world; hundreds and hundreds of them, thousands, millions.

There were destinies and careers for them, but while I wasn't looking, and was thinking of other things which were of no vital importance really, someone must evidently have come along and taken that which should have been mine, the career that was really meant for me if only I had taken the trouble to make up my pack in good time, bowie knife and all, and set off in the right direction.

I'd had too many openings, I suppose, and had sat down to consider them, and sat too long. No greater piece of ill luck could befall a man than for him to have one, two, three, or more good openings in life to choose from. Undecidedly he chooses, and having chosen,

settles in himself it was the wrong one and that any of the others would have suited him better. This point cleared up, he resigns himself to the thought of failure and puts all the blame on his bad choice, and makes no further effort. If I'd only had one opening only, I'd have concentrated on it and succeeded.

Walking on, I shook my head over this, and yet I still could not get rid of the feeling that I had a long and adventurous career before me, ending up as a millionaire cowboy or an explorer, or something connected with going down to the sea in ships. Surely, surely it was time I brushed the idle dreams out of my foolish head. They were boys' dreams. It would have been the boy's privilege to make them come true if he had set to at once. Otherwise they couldn't be done, for things and people move so swiftly.

Alas! time, which up till to-day I had thought my friend, I now found to be my enemy. I certainly must shake off these dreams. What an absurd position for poor Peter Blenerhassett to have these ideas about adventures and hair's-breadth escapes buzzing in his old head. What a ridiculous sight I'd be to myself or to anyone who could fathom my thoughts. A boy wandering about in a middle-aged body, that is what it would be. They must be swept out; thrown out and replaced by other more suitable things. For supposing after all I did take a ticket and go out and try to make some of the dreams come true by taking up the wild, free life I inwardly hankered after, living out in big woods by mountain slopes, away from the silly, strangling ties of a complicated civilisation, what would be the use of it, or where would it leave me? Rheumatism, lumbago or sciatica would grip me in their hot tweezers after a few nights lying on the ground under canvas or in the open, and I'd be a cripple and a dead weight on those around me. How was it I hadn't thought these things out before? We are always thinking things out, but the things that are steepest and deepest are left to the last.

What was it again the Judsons' baby had said? I had reached the age when the middle-aged shrinkage would have set in.

Did one shrink? This was the first I had heard of it, but it was evidently the case. I myself had seen it happen to others, and now I was in for it. I felt myself getting smaller and smaller in my turn. My feet chattered in my boots and my hat rattled loose on my head.

Shrinkage meant, then, decay, and what a thunderbolt of a word that is. I wished that the thought of it had not come so suddenly out of the blue at one fell thud, but in little bits, like instalments of a serial story. I knew physically I was not indestructible; for instance, that if I lay down on a railway line before an express I would get injured; or that if I slashed about too carelessly with my razor I could snick bits out of myself; that a wet day's carpentering left me with a bandaged hand. I had had enough accidents riding or shooting or mountaineering to know that I was liable to damage. But these were honourable scars, and therefore different. But for anyone with any pride of body, who has taken a pleasure in presenting a front, polished to the point of flawlessness, to the world, the thought of this word was horrid.

It means that this physical frame we all had looked upon as the citadel and fortress of our personality is nothing but a jerry-built makeshift, only temporarily weather-tight. A building that, when you are young and could easily face hardship, will shelter you snug and tight, but later, when your day's sun is declining, and you are tired, and want all the protection you can get, begins to crumble and let the cold in, and though there are chinks in the wall, you can't get out. You are immured in it for the remainder of your days, till your course is run. From its battered, sagging terraces and ramparts you must needs hail friend and foe alike, and woe betide you if you have made too many of the latter, for they can come and pry upon you through the

chinks and catch a glimpse of the real you, skulking, ashamed, inside.

You are powerless to repair the ravages time has made in your castle. No one can teach masonry and plumbing of that sort.

Recollection of all the ills the flesh is heir to, and which wait unobtrusively and out of sight at first, but bit by bit come forward till they declare themselves quite boldly and openly, came before me. They are menial and subservient at first and ready to run away at the look of a medicine bottle or sight of a stethoscope, but afterwards they get thoroughly settled in and don't intend to allow themselves to be put out or disturbed by doctors or bottles of any sort.

One can't be a pirate with lumbago. Such a thing has never been heard of; a pirate with a wooden block and a hook for a hand is quite another matter. It's quite in keeping.

Lumbago and I had more than a speaking acquaintance. The shame of it. How utterly curious it was that years ago as a schoolboy hearing of it, it sounded fine and grand to me. It is a sonorous word, and adumbrated an imposing and grandiose malady. Not like measles. Measles were just measley, and suited to badly behaved leggy youths, not keen on washing, preferring to overeat and occupied in shooting out of their clothes. As an overgrown, overeating schoolboy, I had been greatly impressed by elders who had groaned with lumbago. I felt I could have done—as people who won't speak English put it—with an attack of lumbago, as it was such an impressive and grown-up disease. That at school if I'd gone to the matron and instead of being obliged to confess to a bad tummy-ache, brought on by eating too many unripe apples, I'd been able to say, "I've got a shocking bad go of lumbago," she would have thought quite a lot of me and taken me quite seriously and not scolded me as she did over the apples. The Head would have heard of it and also have been impressed. They'd have moved me up

from the bottom of the fourth to the sixth at one go-off, for having lumbago would be sure to improve one's position in a school. It seemed to me that neuritis too was an elegant and adult form of sickness, which went with white spats and gold seals, and took the elders off to fashionable watering-places. I was cowed and impressed, I remember, by them and their ailments, though if I'd known as much as I do now about elders and Continental watering-places I don't know that I should have been so awed at hearing of them going there for their cures. But they seemed so splendidly old to me in those days, as they went off to keep urgent engagements, and hurried slowly with umbrellas, and rattled lots of keys. Big, dark, and imposing like penguins, which are known to be very portentous pow-wowing, law making and abiding birds, which come in the scale of thinking creation rather near the ant.

I had seen photographs of these birds with their solemn Methodist faces, and their humped black backs and white fronts, tending to low-carried corporations, as they sat about impassively in gatherings on the rocks. Perhaps they didn't know it, but all together in black and white and solemn assemblies they looked like those human ludicrous committee meetings come together to waste time, and put spokes in the wheel of any human penguin who had anything worth while to propose in the way of municipal hygiene or social progress.

I used to look up at my solemn elders (and as I thought consequently, betters) and think things, and envy them. They used to look down at me and think things, and envy me. I thought the things they thought of me were that I was perfectly horrid, uncouth and unnecessary and unpleasant. But now I know that when they fixed me with their contemplative stare they were full of envy at me. For I had all before me and they had left all behind. They had eaten their bun, and found that, oddly, though they couldn't have it, they yet had indigestion. I should have been amazed had I known that they envied me for my being

able to climb trees, for my great unappeasable appetite, and for my big white strong boyish teeth, crowded together. They had handsome even sets from the dentist, that came out at night like the stars, but now I know they would have preferred mine.

I like old penguins, and I get on very well with them, and they like me because I am considerate and forbearing with them, and don't pass them by as if they weren't there; but I don't want to be one. I'd hate to be an old broody penguin, wearing down the springs of the arm-chairs at the club, flapping about heavily, shaking my head over the papers and saying the country is going to the dogs. Broody as a word has come to mean everything that has been thwarted in its natural hopes and aspirations, and the comedians when they want to conjure up a picture of a person whose vitality has been weakened by despair or disappointment employ this adjective. The simile has been borrowed from the farmyard and not as yet returned, for the hen who leans in a disheartened way against a tarred fence, thwarted in her instinct towards motherhood, is broody, and her looks constitute the apogee of everything that is disillusioned.

And here was I well on the way to becoming a broody old penguin, outside. And inside, a boy still, full of thoughts and fancies about savages and gold mines, soldiers of fortune and brigands who had relapses into good behaviour.

I used to think old people had old ideals, old hopes and old notions, but now I saw that they had nothing of the sort. Sombre and reverend signiors wander about full of smouldering folly, only half sated on their lust of adventure and high romance. Conscious that such things, though they become a young man, are sad and absurd in an old one. I used to think when I saw the old people, comfortably established by the fireside: "Ah, there they sit, thinking old sober thoughts, dreaming old sober dreams, hoping old sober things." But now I know when I look at them that they are still thinking of young things, of young laughter, of young

efforts—of young follies (unrepentantly). They are still thinking of their young friends and their young gay doings all together, and at the same time they are dreadfully puzzled to make out how it was the time went so quickly by, so that a year seemed nothing, and a whole decade only a few days. They wonder why it was no one told them how short life was and what a need there was of haste, haste, if anything was to be done. They are still regretting, much as I did, the savages, and the big animals in tropical forests and the adventures they've never had in the gold mines or as highwaymen or as the brigand who was hard-hearted and soft-hearted, high-minded and the reverse, as the mood took him, and who had relapses into good behaviour, and rescued captive fair ones, receiving the gift of their vows and tresses of hair in exchange for their unlooked-for and unhoped-for protection. My noble preserver—Ah, don't ! I am unworthy to touch your hand—You have earned my undying gratitude—You make me wish to lead a better, nobler life—Henceforth you are for me the only man—God bless you, I shall never forget your sweet face—And so on.

What would Mrs Penguin say if she could peep inside and see all this ? She'd be horrified, even though she is not altogether guiltless of the same foolishness herself. So Papa Penguin bottles it all up, goes for long walks in the suburbs or in the woods, or pretends to read his paper and behind its white protection sails right off on the high seas. But in spite of his day-dreams he suffers inconceivable agonies from suppressed Romance. Gout, the doctors call it, for want of a better name. But I know better. To want very badly to be a pirate and not to be able to is quite liable to fly to the feet of the poor old buffer, and sufficient to inflame them and the ankles too.

While these thoughts slowly declared themselves in the back of my mind, round the corner of the old square came a light puff of spring wind, as if to make my dismay more complete. This adolescent air came to my

ears and played about them, gently cuffing them, as much as to say : "Now then, old sore-head, don't give in yet. I'm young. Take pattern by me and be young too. It's all just as you like. Whoo—sh !" It whispered silly misleading assertions and rosy promises it would fail in fulfilling, and tugged and tantalised at my heart-strings. The wind was young. The clouds were young. The world was young. Everything was young but me.

Avaunt, Spring !

I walked along bent-headed.

"Now then, pass along there, please, pass along there, please. No loitering."

There was the policeman on duty. I seemed to know his face. He was stirring up, not unkindly, an old lady, a poor old battered female penguin of the lower classes, who was supposed to be selling bootlaces and collar studs, but wasn't. Instead she was sitting dozing wretchedly on a doorstep, and the spring sun was powerless to warm her. Someone had come along and sneaked her destiny from under her nose, or she wouldn't have been reduced to these straits.

"Don't chivey her, Officer, there's a good chap. Let her doze."

I gave her something, and him too.

"Oh, all right, Sir. Thank you. You're a gentleman, Sir. But it does look rather bad to see them drowsing like that on the steps of a gentleman's 'ouse. The occupiers don't like it. I'm always getting into trouble about it, as I'm a tender-hearted man like and I don't 'alf like this job. I don't suppose it's 'er fault."

"It's not her fault, poor old soul. It's all these young ones on every side. They've done her in."'

"What young ones, Sir, do you refer to ?"

"Oh, any young ones." I looked around vaguely. There were plenty babies in perambulators about and tots walking alongside too. In my preoccupation I'd come round in a circle and there was the baby from No. 13 coming towards us again.

"Officer," I said earnestly, "believe me, if you were keen on your job you'd arrest these babies." I pointed with my stick to a clump of mailcarts and perambulators advancing slowly at the other side of the street on the circular path round the square.

"Arrest them, Sir. But why should I do that?"

"Because they're robbers, Officer. Naughty little thieves."

"Bless their little 'arts, Sir. I'm devoted to children. I always makes a point of seeing them over the crossings myself wherever the traffic is thick. Of course they're naughty. That's 'uman nature."

"Human nature is the very thing you are here to suppress and hold in check, on behalf of his Majesty's Government."

"His Majesty's Government never said nothing to me about babies, Sir."

"It should have done so! I assure you I'm not joking. They're the most unutterable little wretches. I've had my eyes opened this morning. I've had a shock, I can tell you!" I was quite in earnest and very agitated.

"Come, come, Sir. It's very 'ot. Don't get excited. Don't you think you'd better nip into a taxi and go 'ome and 'ave a cool drink? You've very likely got a touch of the sun."

"I've not got a touch of the sun. I tell you they are thieves, Officer," obstinately.

I tapped him on his blue chest with my eyeglass.

"What have they stolen?" humouring me and looking around surreptitiously to see if there was a taxi in sight anywhere.

"It's not what they have stolen, but what they are going to steal."

"What are they going to steal?" patiently.

"Everything. Everything that's yours and mine by rights, everything that's worth having. Opportunities, laughter, success, consideration—the whole world!"

"Opportunities, laughter, consideration, success—all very good in their way—yes." He stamped a little bit on the pavement, and straightened his back, and looked at some more perambulators coming our way.

"I suppose you are right, Sir, in saying such things constitoote the whole world. Opportunities certainly are very useful things. I got mine quite by chance. But, again, Sir, the law doesn't bother itself much with such.

"Well then, I'll be the parish beadle redivivus and write the law down a hass. I'll do it this very instant. I'll make a note of it now. I'll put it in my next article."

I crooked my stick on my arm and proceeded to get out paper and pencil.

"Oh, I see! you're one of these writer chaps. Excuse me, Sir, but for a moment I thought you was a bit——"

"Not at all. Not in the least."

"Well, if it comes to that, Sir, I see your point. I do, really. But the law is that you cannot arrest a person who is going to commit a crime even if you know he is going to do it. You must wait till he has done it."

"That's so, unfortunately; but, believe me, before you know where you are these youngsters will strip you of everything. Look at those little ragamuffins there, playing up and down those steps. Mark my words, one of those youngsters will sneak the bread out of your mouth one of these days. The odds are all in favour of it. You can't say I haven't warned you."

"No, no, Sir. Don't you worry. I've got my pension. Besides in my walk of life our children look after us when we get old. I looked after my old father, and my children will look after me. That is, unless they grow too big for their boots and make a lot of money and join your class, Sir. The ingratitude of children of your class towards their parents is a favourite topic in ours. In all the servants' 'alls where I drop in for a snack at odd times they are never done discussing it. They see so much of it in these swagger 'ouses."

"Ah, that's as may be. If it's so, it's a great pity. I'm not a father myself, so I don't know. But I don't think you and I see the thing from quite the same point of view. I refer in the main to the more, shall we say, immaterial things of life."

"I 'aven't time to think of those, Sir." He shook his head, and a queer smile came on his kindly London face. "I'm up against real things, Sir, you see, all day. And especially when I'm on a night beat."

"Ah, well. I see *your* point. So long, Officer, and many thanks for not arresting me as——"

"Don't mention it, Sir."

I could not settle down to work that night, though I had no engagements. There in my rooms the Judsons' baby's words kept buzzing in my ear. The spring kept climbing in at my window in a persistent, aggravating way. The sounds from without, the ordinary common ribald street noises, took on the timbre, the very reed-pipe sounds of spring. I walked my room feverishly. At last I said I would go out: I decided on some restaurant or gaudy supper club, whence all fresh outer air was sternly excluded, and there to half dine, half sup, as the hour was too late for the one meal, too early for the other. A place where I could not think, where the people would distract me, and the band hound the thoughts that pursued me out of my head. A closely curtained, garishly lit place, where there were no crannies for the slender-waisted season to slip in at and continue to haunt me. Even if I got away from it for a few hours it would be a respite.

If I were going to be old (and the Judsons' baby said it was so), I grimly decided I would go and live somewhere where it was perpetually autumn. I could never face the English spring again. Or I'd travel round the globe and follow in the hushed footsteps of the fall of the year as it visited the different places, and so always be surrounded by drifting leaves and the

soft rank odours of decaying vegetation, past its prime, and thus be companioned always by something that sorted with my mood. What was that piece of poetry that spoke of something being "thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks in Vallombrosa"? Vallombrosa would know me in its autumn with its leaves.

I banged the door and stepped into the street, and it was full of the spring evening. The spring of the mews and of the small connecting and side streets of London was on either hand as I walked on. Children playing untidily but not unhappily in the gutter and on the kerb in the half-light ; women on benches or in doorways gossiping. Ale-house doors propped open and not fully lit, with a strew of fresh sawdust on the floor, and people in and out haw-hawing. Spring jokes, spring cabbages, couples promenading and winkle barrows and organ-grinding were on all sides of me as I walked forth from my rooms not far from the Temple.

As I got near my destination a shy young moon saw me into my haunt of revelry, wavering uncertainly up in the sky as if she had come to keep an appointment and wasn't sure whether to remain or run away round the corner. She had a does-your-mother-know-you're-out, does-she-know-what-you're-about look on her little pale face, and she'd surely pop off soon, nimble-heels, too embarrassed to stay and see the matter out.

I hadn't come there to enjoy myself, and I promptly snubbed the waiter who with opaque transparency professed to make believe that he thought I had, rubbing his hands insinuatingly. I looked around to see if there were any other penguins there, and saw one who had evidently been admitted to the Stock Exchange. A blasé and I'm afraid slightly dissolute look tried to dispose of itself unobserved amongst his penguin-like features, but failed. I looked at him searchingly, to see how he behaved. I was in my initial stages, I was only a young penguin as yet, but I felt it wouldn't take long to complete the job.

I was ordering ferociously, I think grilled steak with the bone left in it. I'd have asked for it tough if I had not thought it would have scandalised the waiter. Something to bite and snarl over would be right for me. The band, upon which I was reckoning to right about my unwelcome state of mind, had not begun, and I kept turning things over in my mind. Why hadn't that young donkey I was once done differently? How dare he waste his time the way he did when it wasn't his time at all! It was *my* time. Think of all the things he could have done, all the places he could have gone to, instead of ragging around in the way he had elected to. Fooling my valuable time away, that was what he had been doing. If I could get at him. Why should I, a thoroughly nice, distinguished-looking man of a certain age, have to live with his silly mistakes? He'd landed me in a good few. Making enemies of people who might have been useful, cultivating those who were utterly useless, sitting down under a lot of nonsense and accepting back talk without protest from people who ought to have been put in their places long before instead of leaving it to the eleventh hour to square accounts. Letting them get ahead instead of hitting out and giving them what they had asked for. Next life I lived I decided, as I crumbled up my bread angrily into small pellets, I'd revenge myself on my enemies in good time, but not only would I revenge myself in good time, but I'd revenge myself on them before they attacked me, in case I was too busy or died before I could attend to it. One can always tell by the look of a person if they are likely to try to injure one: it betrays itself in the very earliest stages of the acquaintanceship and it's gross carelessness not to settle such people in good time. How many briefs were there that ought to have come my way but instead were swallowed up in that great greedy black bag of Pettigrew's, who was now a silk. There'd be no more delays of that sort next time. I'd settle him instanter.

Then think of all the friends the young loon might have made, all those influential——

"What would you like to drink, Sir?"

Tchaw! What's the use of wine when you're getting old? My doctor had expressly said—— But I must take something to-night. Bother the doctor. I ran through the list, carelessly at first, then appreciatively. They had an excellent cellar: I could see. Evidently taken quite a lot of trouble over it.

I ordered.

If you wanted a thing to be right, you had to see to it in time. Notably this cellar. There was nothing haphazard about that. Time and trouble had gone to the getting together of that. If that chuckle-headed boy had seen to it in time, look, as I said, at the friends he could have made. Friends to send him briefs, friends to go shooting with, friends with salmon-fishing in Norway, or friends willing to mount him when he got a few days off in the season. He ought to have set about it methodically. I was still scanning the wine list. He should have done as the restaurant people had done with their cellar, laid down a stock of well-chosen and carefully varied friends to be used and drawn upon in the future as required. But would he think of doing a thing like that? Not he! He thought of nothing but his own selfish pleasures. I carved at my steak sulkily and absent-mindedly, pulling it away from the bone and piling it upon my plate. I didn't attempt to swallow it. I think it would have stuck in my gullet. As I plied my knife and fork I was really thinking, coming to definite conclusions inwardly. I would give up this poking about in musty law books and legal hair-splittings and the wearing down of nibs in drawing attention to the foibles of my fellow-creatures, vivisecting them on the chance of earning a little money or to raise a mirthless laugh against them.

I would (come lumbago, rheumatism, arthritis or any other itis) shake off the enthrallin dust of London,

that multiple, magical, amazing dust that sticks so heavily to one's feet, that weights and ties them down, so that they cling to the pavements, and become laggard to move away and take on any other dust less wonderfully compounded.

I'd get me out without delay to a wide country with rushing rivers, where Nature alone was in possession and where I could be her pensioner, and in return for the day's work of a real man have enough of her bounty to live a man's life.

So that was settled.

The music struck up now, or rather rose up, like wind in trees, gradually and then louder. I put down my knife and fork and almost laid my head in my hands. It was not the loud foolish music I had hoped for, to drive away dull care. It was good and sad and seemed to reproach me, and sang of every single thing I had come there to forget. All the springs that had slipped through my fingers were in the music.

Time was when music and I were boon companions. A whole orchestra would put itself about to describe all the wonderful things that were going to happen to me, and beat out a chorus of praise and encouragement.

But now for the first time in my life it seemed to me that it spoke no longer of possibilities but of memories, and worse still of memories of possibilities—sad might-have-beens. It would never sound the same to me again.

What is the good of music if one is old? I wished it would stop. To distract my own attention from my own ears I used my eyes, searching the room with my glance. The stockbroking penguin was not out with Mother Penguin. He had brought out an elegant, tall young creature, who sat facing him, entertaining him with her conversation, but evidently considering that as long as her tongue attended to him her eyes could attend to anyone else who struck her wandering fancy. They came over to my table repeatedly. If it hadn't

been for what the Judsons' baby had said, I should have returned her big, heartening glance with some interest, but I hadn't it in me just now, and turned my own elsewhere.

What is the use of beauty if one is old ?

Besides, hadn't I reached the age when one is chary about seeking new pleasures ? When one measures them carefully and askance to gauge if there is room for them in one's life—almost as one measures a piece of furniture to see if there is wall space for it or if it can be got up the stairs without spoiling the decorations of one's house ? Ah ! youth is the time when you leap and don't look. One plunges in, takes all and leaves payment in the lap of the gods.

So I avoided her kind beautiful glances. Let her keep them for the Judsons' baby and his prototypes. I would have my work cut out learning up the ways and manners and customs of that tribe of dreary fowl I would soon be called upon to join and mix with I'd contrive to be as complete a penguin within as without. I would strangle mercilessly all yearnings after the lighter things of life. I made notes on my cuff of things not to be done, of phrases to eschew. To rag, to rot, must be taken out of my vocabulary. I must not call anyone a giddy goat any more, or when smitten by astonishment utter " By Gum ! " or something of that sort of slang. Instead I would have to say it was a monstrous thing, by gad ! and when in doubt, mark time by saying, " 'Pon-my-word, 'pon-my-word ! "

The transition stage would be painful, very. Why couldn't these alterations that affect man come upon him as they do on the creatures of the insect world, when the egg changes to the caterpillar and the caterpillar to the chrysalis, and when from the chrysalis emerges the butterfly ? The best is kept (as it should be) for the last. There's no flaunting about with bright wings in the sunlight and then towards evening crawling into a withered covering, crushing and folding and spoiling the lovely wings that had carried one

about so bravely during the day. The butterfly progresses through a series of reincarnations and has his separate friends in each of them. It wouldn't matter for man if he came into existence as a ready-made prosy old buffer, but to change from a smart man about town who is wanted everywhere into an old penguin who is wanted nowhere, is a wrench, a decided wrench.

The music began again. I did not think I could sit and listen to it. I'd get back to my rooms, go to bed and draw the blankets right over my head. I called to the waiter to bring me my bill. He was already on his way with a scrap of folded paper in his hand.

"Excuse me, Sir, but is your name Blenerhassett?

"It is."

"Then this note is for you, Sir. It's sent by a lady in the next room through the arch."

A note from a lady. The excitement of it! I forgot instantly I was a penguin!

I read:

"PETER DEAR, do come and join us. I am chaperoning Miss Bellamy to oblige the Judson boy. We are both so bored we hardly know what to do with ourselves. He is so terribly callow. Miss Bellamy says she saw you this morning and thinks you are about the age she prefers a man to be. If you don't come we will both go home. Tear this up into tiny pieces and come over at once.

"CELIA."

I got up and went over. The end was not quite yet, apparently.

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